

9 December 2010

Ms Therese Gillespie
Corporate Director for Children and Young People
PO Box 2082
South Gloucestershire Council
Castle Street, BS35 9BQ

Dear Ms Gillespie

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services in South Gloucestershire Council, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, the minimum requirements for each grade outlined in the guidance do not alone define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

South Gloucestershire Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in South Gloucestershire Council perform adequately. In 2009, a transitional year, they were assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is not enough good provision, particularly early years and secondary school provision, to meet the minimum requirements for that grade.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Whilst education for very young children is good, the overall quality of day-care provision is adequate. Primary schools are good overall. All the local special schools are good or better and the one pupil referral unit is good. However, whilst some are outstanding, less than a half of secondary schools and school sixth forms overall are good or better. The one further education college is good and this caters for nearly a half of the 16- to 19-year-olds attending education and training provision in the area. The local authority's fostering service is outstanding and its adoption service is good.

Provision for safeguarding is adequate overall and for looked after children it is good. The local authority's front-line child protection arrangements have a broad balance of strengths and areas needing development. There has been one review of death or serious injury to a child since last year. This was conducted well. The local authority takes satisfactory measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

Performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes the very large majority of the main measures of educational attainment. At the age of five and 16, test and examination results are broadly in line with the average in similar areas. However, at the age of 11 they are substantially higher and by the age of 19 lower, particularly in terms of young people achieving a qualification equivalent to two good A levels. The rate of improvement over recent years at the age of 11 has been broadly in line with the national average, although there was a dip in 2010. At the age of 16 and 19 the rates of improvement have been significantly below average. However, the very latest provisional figures for young people aged 16 show a much better improvement than seen nationally. Children and young people from low-income families achieve about as well as the average for this group elsewhere, as do those with special educational needs.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of secondary schools, including sixth form provision.
- Improve young people's educational attainment by the age of 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. The proportion of children who are seriously overweight at the age of five and 11 is close to the average in similar areas. This is despite the number of young people regularly taking part in sport being well above the average nationally. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is lower than the average for similar areas but the reduction over the last decade has been modest, which is similar to the national picture. Better progress has been made than found nationally in developing comprehensive provision for those with emotional and mental health difficulties.

Provision for safeguarding is adequate overall and the local authority's front-line child protection arrangements have a broad balance of strengths and areas needing development. There has been one review of death or serious injury to a child since last year and this was conducted well. The very large majority of individual services like schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. However, new arrangements to improve the way services work together to identify problems early and provide support before they become very serious have yet to be fully embedded. The local authority takes satisfactory measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements. Provision for young people in care is good overall and this includes good partnership working between the key agencies involved. Young people's health and education needs are particularly well met. The local authority's fostering service is outstanding and its adoption service is good. The number of serious injuries to young people has gone down more than found nationally over recent years. The number of young people who say they have been bullied is broadly in line with the average in similar areas.

The quality of day-care provision for very young children, whilst improving, is currently only adequate overall, which is significantly below the national average. However, education for this age group is good and close to the average. Primary schools have also improved and are good overall. However, whilst some are outstanding, less than a half of secondary schools overall are good or better, which is well below the national average. One secondary school is now inadequate, whereas there were no such schools last year. The one pupil referral unit is, however, good. The achievement of children at the age of five is broadly in line with the average in similar areas. At the age of 11 it is substantially above but at the age of 16 it is below. The rate of improvement over recent years has been broadly in line with the national average at the age of 11 but significantly slower at the age of 16. However, the 2010 provisional results for young people aged 16 show a much better improvement than seen nationally. Also, the numbers of primary and secondary schools meeting minimum requirements for pupil attainment have both gone up over recent years. Attendance in secondary schools is much better than average. At the age of 11 and 16 children and young people from low-income families achieve about as well as the average for this group elsewhere. However, there has been a decline over recent years in the figure at the age of 11 and only a marginal improvement in the one at the age of 16. In both cases the gap between the performance of these young people and others has widened substantially. The achievement in national

tests of those with special educational needs is close to the average for this group elsewhere, both at the age of 11 and 16. However, there has been some recent success in narrowing the gap between these pupils and others at the age of 16. All the local special schools are good or better, and this is much better than nationally. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest needs, many of whom are unable to take the national tests.

The proportion of young people involved in organised group activities outside school is broadly in line with the average in similar areas, as is the number who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently. Integrated youth support provision is good, with well-established and effective multi-agency working. Re-offending by young people is lower than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services to seek young people's views and involve them in decision-making.

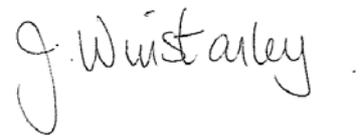
The very large majority of services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. The one further education college is good and this provides for nearly a half of students aged 16 to 19. However, less than a quarter of school sixth forms are good or better, which is well below the national average. The rest are only satisfactory. The number of young people staying on in education or training when they reach school leaving age and the number aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training are broadly in line with the averages in similar areas. By the age of 19 the proportion of young people achieving qualifications equal to five good GCSEs is lower than the similar area average. For those achieving qualifications equal to two good A levels the figure is much lower. The rate of improvement for both measures over recent years has been significantly slower than the national average. By the age of 19 young people from low-income families do substantially better than the average elsewhere on the five GCSE measure, and marginally better on the two A level measure. There has been a narrowing of the gap between the performance of these young people and others over recent years.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs, and are well informed by the views of children and young people themselves. This is appropriately reflected in the improvement priorities set. There are some good examples of effective collaborative working between the local authority and its partners but further progress is still needed to embed all the improvements planned in such respects. The local authority has had some significant recent success in improving the overall standard of its early years and primary provision. However, in the case of secondary schools and their sixth forms it has been less successful. This is mirrored by the comparatively slow progress made until last year in raising young people's educational attainment at the age of 16 and 19. However, the 2010 provisional GCSE figures show a much better improvement than seen nationally. Overall, whilst there have been some recent successes, the local authority's track record of improvement over the last few years is mixed.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment