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Ms Jane Humphreys
Corporate Director, Children, Education and Social Care
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
PO Box 228, Municipal Buildings
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Dear Ms Humphreys

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council perform well. This good performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of settings, services and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and the very large majority of provision helps children and young people learn well and stay safe. Areas of strength and areas for development remain largely the same as last year.

The September 2010 inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found that safeguarding arrangements were adequate and services for looked after children were good. The unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection, carried out in May 2011, identified areas of practice that met requirements and no areas that required urgent attention.

Strengths

- For children under five, the provision has improved this year. The four children's centres inspected are good. The very large majority of nursery provision is good or better. In 2010, levels of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage were in line with the average for similar areas and above the national average.
- Primary schools are mostly good and outcomes at the age of 11 have improved substantially over the past few years. In 2010, results at Key Stage 2 were above similar areas and the national average. Provisional results for 2011 show a small drop of 1%.
- The local authority provided good support to the small number of primary and secondary schools that were in an Ofsted category of concern last year. Ofsted monitoring visits to these schools show that support to bring about improvement has been effective and these schools are no longer inadequate.
- Eight of the 10 local authority secondary schools are good or outstanding. The other two are satisfactory. The two academies have not been inspected yet, but one was inadequate and the other satisfactory when last inspected as local authority schools. Over the past four years, results at higher grade GCSE including English and mathematics have improved and match similar areas. Provisional results for 2011 show further improvement.
- By the age of 19, the proportion of young people achieving a level 2 qualification matches the average in similar areas and, at level 3, it is above. The quality of provision in the school sixth forms is at least good.

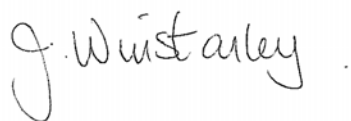
- As reported in 2010, specialist education provision is mostly good. One special school, the special school sixth form and the residential special school for young people with complex needs are outstanding. The pupil referral unit remains good. Two special schools are satisfactory.
- Provision for looked after children is good. The high quality of the four local authority children's homes has been maintained. Three of the four homes are outstanding and one is good. The privately-run home, inspected in January 2011, has improved and is now satisfactory. At the time of its inspection the home was providing accommodation for three children with a learning disability.

Areas for further improvement

- The most recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified six areas for development, some of which remain from the previous inspection in January 2010. For example, the number of inappropriate referrals to social care is still too high and the quality of case recording, including reasons for the delays in the completion of assessments, is not always sufficiently accurate.
- Childminding provision has not improved and is mostly satisfactory, as it was in 2010.
- At all ages, gaps in attainment between children and young people from low-income families and the majority of children in Stockton-on-Tees are not closing.
- As reported in last year's assessment, the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is above similar areas.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment