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8 November 2011

Ms Lesley Heale  
Director for People  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
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Dear Ms Heale

## 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.

## Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. This good performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall. The very large majority of provision helps children and young people learn well and stay safe. Areas of strength remain the same as last year. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place. One inadequate secondary school, including its sixth form, has closed and there are now six secondary academies. Inspection judgements for schools that have become academies have been taken into account in this assessment.

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 April 2011, found one strength, many aspects of practice that met requirements and no areas that need urgent remedial action. All areas, bar one, identified for development at the previous inspection in August 2010 have been addressed fully. Further improvement is required to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are met promptly.

### Strengths

- For children under five, the large majority of provision in early years and childcare settings is good or outstanding, as it was in 2010. The children's centres inspected provide effective support to children and families. The very large majority of nurseries are good or outstanding. Children are well prepared for school. Over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved and are above similar areas and the national average. Very young children from low-income families do better than such children nationally and in similar areas.
- As in 2010, provision is mostly good or better in primary schools. The local authority continues to provide effective support to the schools in an Ofsted category of concern, enabling them to make at least satisfactory progress. Over the past four years, results at the age of 11 have improved at a faster pace than found elsewhere and, in 2010, Key Stage 2 results were above similar areas and the national average. Provisional results for 2011 show that these standards have been maintained.
- Specialist education provision is mostly good, as it was in 2010. Three of the five special schools and two of the three special school sixth forms are good. The residential special school is outstanding, as are two of the three pupil referral units. One pupil referral unit and two special schools are satisfactory.

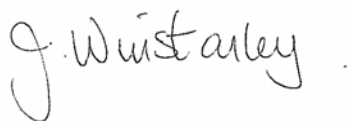
- Almost all local authority secondary schools are good or outstanding and none are inadequate. Over the past four years, results at the age of 16 have improved substantially. As reported in 2010, they continue to match the average in similar areas and are above the national figure. The proportion of 16-year-olds eligible for free school meals who achieve at least five GCSE at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics is also improving, however, the attainment gap between them and the majority of young people in Solihull is wider than in similar areas.
- The inspection of the youth offending service, in March 2011, reported good outcomes in the key areas of performance inspected. Services are effective with good prospects for future improvement.
- For looked after children, the quality of provision remains as it was in 2010. There are two privately-run children's homes in the area, of which one is good and the other is inadequate. No children are placed in the inadequate children's home and the large majority of providers used by the local authority are good or better. The local authority fostering agency is good and the adoption agency is adequate.

#### **Areas for further improvement**

- The quality of the academies is mixed. Two were outstanding when last inspected as local authority schools, but the others were mostly satisfactory. A new academy opened in early 2011 and was inadequate when inspected as a local authority school in 2010. The Ofsted monitoring visits to these academies show them making at least satisfactory progress in raising standards.
- Provision for post-16 learning is consistently good in the two colleges, but only satisfactory in the school sixth forms. By the age of 19, results overall match those of similar areas. There has been some success in narrowing the attainment gap between the majority of 19-year-olds in Solihull and those from a low-income background, particularly in the increasing proportion of young people achieving a level 2 qualification. However, improvement has not been so marked at level 3 and still too few young people from a low-income background go into higher education.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment