

9 December 2010

Mr John Gilbert  
Group Director of Children's Services  
Swindon Borough Council  
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Dear Mr Gilbert

## 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, 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, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone, does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Swindon Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Swindon Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better and last year's strong performance overall has been maintained. The local authority's adoption service is outstanding and the fostering service is good. The large majority of primary and secondary schools are good or better and there are now no inadequate schools. Early years and childcare settings, as well as nursery provision, are also good overall and the quality of childminding has improved in the last year. Post-16 education provision is not as good as that found nationally, with three of the seven institutions judged to be only satisfactory. Following a drop in inspection grades over the last year, special schools are also not as good as provision found nationally and the pupil referral unit is now inadequate. Arrangements to help children stay safe and achieve well are good or better in the very large majority of services.

An inspection of safeguarding arrangements in January 2010 judged services to be good and capacity to improve to be outstanding. Services for looked after children were also judged to be good.

The large majority of national performance measures show that outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better, but performance on the main measures of education attainment is not as good. Standards at the end of the Reception Year in primary school are in the top 25% of all local authorities and in line with the average for similar areas. Test results for 11-years-olds are broadly average, while results for 16-year-olds showed a marked improvement in 2009 which brought them much closer to the average for similar areas. The number of 19-year-olds gaining qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs, or two A levels, is improving, but remains below average. The local authority is narrowing the gap in attainment between the majority of children at age 11 and those with special educational needs, as well as those from low-income families, but has yet to replicate this success at age 16. The number of young people who are not in education, training or work has been above the average for similar areas for a number of years.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve provision in special schools and in the pupil referral unit.
- Improve educational outcomes for young people at age 16 and 19.

## Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are good in the very large majority of settings and services. Improvements include the significant reduction in teenage pregnancies since 1998, although there is still some way to go to reach the average for the region. Reducing the number of children who are seriously overweight has also been a key priority and progress has been made in the last year. However, the number of children and young people taking part in regular sport and physical activities remains below average for similar areas, despite some improvement. Services to promote the health of children in care and care leavers are good.

The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is good. Local services work together very well to identify and protect children at risk of harm and to ensure their needs are met swiftly. Successful work has been undertaken to raise public awareness of safeguarding as 'everyone's business', and to tackle concerns raised by children and young people, such as cyber bullying. The local authority and its partners have appropriate plans in place to improve the safety of children in the community by reducing road traffic accidents and the number of children who are admitted to hospital for unintentional or deliberate injuries. Support for disabled children and their families is good and improving, with a strong focus on integrated work by health and social care services.

The very large majority of childcare settings, schools and sixth form schools are good at helping children and young people achieve well and enjoy learning. The pupil referral unit and one special school were judged to be inadequate at the last inspection, but are now making satisfactory progress following prompt action by the local authority. Educational standards at the end of the Reception Year in primary schools are in line with the average for similar areas and in the top 25% of all local authorities. The proportion of primary schools that are good or better has increased in the last year. Test results for 11-year-olds are in line with the average for similar areas. However, in 2009, the performance of Asian children – who made up almost seven percent of the age group – fell sharply to ten percentage points below the average of other children locally. Provisional figures for all 11-year-olds in 2010 show a dip. Examination results for 16-year-olds improved markedly in 2009 which brought them much closer to the average for similar areas. The local authority is having some success in closing the gap in attainment between the majority of children at the end of primary schools and those from low-income families, as well as those with special educational needs. However, it has yet to replicate this success at age 16 where the gap is widening. Behaviour in secondary schools is good overall. Rates of persistent absence are well below average. Support for the education of children in care, including those in placements outside the borough, is good.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services are good in the large majority of services. Inspectors found excellent examples of children and young people influencing the work of the local authority and its partners. Good partnership work is helping to steer young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour. By most measures, the youth offending service

works reasonably well. The number of young people convicted of a crime for the first time has fallen significantly. Re-offending rates are in line with the average for similar areas, but young offenders are much less likely to have a place to live that meets their needs.

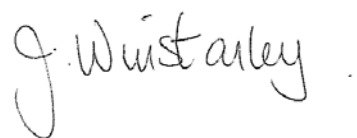
Improving outcomes for 16- to 19-year-olds is a key priority in local plans. Inspections show that young people overall have good support in schools and colleges to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get a job or to continue their studies. However, the overall quality of post-16 education provision is not as good as that found nationally. The number of young people staying on in education or training at age 16 is about average, but the number gaining qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs, or two A levels, is below the average for similar areas, and outcomes for those from low-income families are worse still. The *Route 16+* service offers effective support for care leavers. The number of young people who are not in work, education or training is comparatively high and has risen for three consecutive years. The local authority and its partners have set ambitious targets to reduce this figure and recognise the real challenge presented in the current economic climate.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Swindon's Children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. The recent inspection of safeguarding judged the capacity to improve as outstanding and leadership and management of key services as good. The local authority has clear plans underpinned by robust need analysis. Its success in tackling the right priorities can be seen, for example, in the marked reduction in teenage conception rates, the good and improving safeguarding services and the increase in the number of good primary schools. Developing the children's services' workforce has been a high priority for many years, supported by extensive and well-embedded partnerships with health and police services. Effective partnerships with the private, voluntary and community sectors are also helping to ensure services meet local need. Educational outcomes are improving overall, but remain below average for 16- and 19-year-olds. The local authority and its partners have plans in place to further raise aspirations, close gaps in attainment and reduce the numbers of young people who are not in education, training or work.

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