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9 December 2010

Ms Jane Humphreys
Corporate Director, Children, Education and Social Care
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
PO Box 228
Municipal Buildings, Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1XE

Dear Ms Humphreys

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 Stockton-on-Tees Borough 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.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of nurseries, primary schools and secondary schools, including the sixth forms, inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The four local authority children's homes are particularly strong, with three judged to be outstanding and one good. The pupil referral unit is also good. Much provision in special schools is satisfactory, with one of the three special schools judged to be outstanding. The special sixth form and the residential special school provision are outstanding. Early years and childcare settings are also mostly satisfactory. The general college of further education and the sixth form college are satisfactory. The local fostering and adoption agencies are good.

The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in January 2010 identified two areas for priority action and reported that, at that time, potential risks to children were not sufficiently recognised. Improvement has been significant and the latest inspection of safeguarding arrangements reported that the overall effectiveness of services was adequate.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Children and young people do as well as in similar areas at ages 11 and 16. GCSE results match similar areas, although 16-year-olds who have special educational needs and those from low-income families do less well than others of the same age nationally. This is also the case for 19-year-olds from low-income families who do not gain as many good qualifications as those from similar backgrounds across the country. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is higher than in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve early years, childcare settings and special schools so that more are good or better.
- Increase the proportion of young people from low-income families who gain good GCSEs at age 16 and good qualifications by the age of 19.
- Improve educational outcomes of 16-year-olds who have special education needs.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are mostly successful. Nearly all schools and children's homes are good at this. Sexual health education needs to be more effective because teenage conception is high.

The local authority recognises in its 2009–2012 Children and Young People's Plan that progress to reduce the number of young women under the age of 18 who get pregnant has been too slow. Services for young people who have emotional or mental health difficulties are improving, although more remains to be done to ensure that the full range of services is provided. Actions to reduce the number of children who are overweight have been effective and the proportion of obese children match similar areas.

Ofsted inspections of schools and colleges show that arrangements for keeping children and young people safe in schools and other settings are good. For example, fewer young people say that they feel bullied than elsewhere. However, an above average proportion of children are admitted to hospital because they are injured either accidentally or deliberately. Safeguarding arrangements are now strengthened and the serious concerns identified in the January 2010 unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services have been successfully remedied. These include better performance management of cases, more stable staffing and improved management arrangements. Leadership and management for safeguarding and services to looked after children are good strategically with appropriate priority being given to these services. More needs to be done to translate these strategic priorities into practice of consistently high quality.

Most nurseries, primary schools and secondary schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Provision in the school sixth forms is also good. Young people in the pupil referral unit and in one special school progress well. The two special schools rated less highly at their last inspection do not manage the learning of some pupils well enough and achievement is therefore impeded. The general college of further education and the sixth form college, inspected respectively in March and in May 2010, are satisfactory overall. However, achievement is too low in some areas of the curriculum. Too many students do not progress well enough and drop out of their chosen courses before qualifying. At the end of primary school, children do as well as in similar areas, although pupils in Stockton make slow progress in English from ages seven to 11. The targets set in the Children and Young People's Plan for results in national tests at age 11 have been achieved in 2010 with a good increase in results. Standards have risen in secondary schools and, by the age of 16, young people do as well as elsewhere. Provisional GCSE results for 2010 show further improvement. At that age, however, young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families do not do as well as similar groups nationally. Behaviour is good in secondary schools, permanent exclusions are lower than found nationally and attendance matches similar areas.

Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in making decisions and being positively active in their communities. The proportion of young people who break the law for the first time has reduced significantly across the borough. Almost all those who offend are in work, education or training. The proportion of young people who break the law more than once is, however, above average and not improving. The inspection of the youth offending service in January 2010 reported that the service was performing well in many key areas and had good

access to a broad range of resources. However, it also reported that more needed to be done to increase the numbers of young people who complied with the requirements of their supervision.

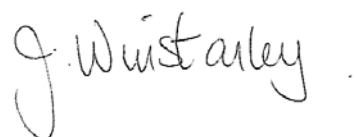
The local authority recognises that not all young people do as well as they can by the age of 19, particularly those who have complex needs and those from low-income families. A lower proportion than in similar areas achieve good qualifications by the age of 19. The 2009–2010 Children’s Trust Board self-evaluation summary confirms that strategies to increase the achievement of young people from low-income families have not been sufficiently effective. The recent inspection of services for looked after children found that care leavers’ needs are being met well and there is effective joint working with housing to ensure that care leavers have access to suitable accommodation. The numbers of care leavers, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are not in education, work or training has reduced. The transition from secondary education to further learning at age 16 for all care leavers is well managed.

Prospects for improvement

Most outcomes for children and young people are improving in Stockton-on-Tees. The review of the Children and Young People’s Plan demonstrates good progress in delivering many programmes and it accurately recognises that, in some areas, the intended impact on outcomes has yet to materialise; for example in some aspects of health and in reducing inequalities in education. The review of the Children and Young People’s Plan identifies what needs to be done, although clear targets, against which educational outcomes for young people from low-income families will be measured, require clarification. Ofsted monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. The recent inspection of safeguarding found that capacity for improvement was adequate and that capacity to improve services for looked after children, young people and care leavers was good.

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