

9 December 2010

Ms Romi Bowen
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Southwark
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Dear Ms Bowen

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.

The London Borough of Southwark children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Southwark perform adequately. In 2009, a transitional year, Southwark was assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is not enough good universal provision to meet the minimum requirements for that grade.

The majority of early years and childcare provision is good or better, but over 40% is only satisfactory. The proportion of primary schools that are good or better has increased, but a third are satisfactory and a small number of primary schools are inadequate. At secondary level, a high proportion of schools are academies. Over 40% of these are satisfactory and one is currently inadequate. However, over 70% of local authority maintained secondary schools are good or better. Half of secondary school sixth forms are good or better and the general further education college is satisfactory. The local authority children's home is outstanding and the local authority's adoption and fostering agencies are good. Six of the nine local authority special schools are good or better and three are satisfactory. The independent special school is satisfactory. Most secondary special sixth form provision is at least good. One of the two pupil referral units is outstanding, the other is satisfactory. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified a broad balance of strengths and areas for development, but no very serious weaknesses requiring urgent action.

The very large majority of national performance measures show outcomes for children in Southwark are at least in line with appropriate comparators. Levels of childhood obesity are higher than the average for similar areas. Performance measures for educational attainment show outcomes that are in line with or above similar areas. Test and examination results for children and young people from low-income families are improving year on year. More young people are getting five good GCSEs and two A levels or equivalent qualifications by the age of 19 than in previous years, but the numbers not in work, education or training is higher than the average for similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of universal provision for children and young people so that more is good or better.
- Reduce rates of childhood obesity.
- Reduce the numbers of young people not in work, education or training.

Outcomes for children and young people

Inspection judgements show that local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthily are good in most settings and services. The local authority and its partners have had success in improving the health of babies, such as improved rates of breast-feeding six weeks after birth which are above the national average. Childhood obesity continues to be a challenge in Southwark as the borough has some of the highest levels across the country for both five- and 11-year-old children. Although there was a small fall in the numbers of five-year-olds that are seriously overweight in 2009, there was a small increase for 11-year-olds. The local authority and its partners are prioritising the issue. The latest data show that Southwark now has the sixth highest rate of teenage conceptions nationally but is making comparatively good progress in reducing the rate. Redesigned strategies and services are also improving sexual health, such as increasing numbers of young people being screened for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted disease.

Arrangements for helping children and young people to stay safe are good in the majority of all types of settings and services and in the large majority of schools. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services identified key strengths, such as the well motivated staff, the accessibility of managers, the auditing of services and the way in which equality and diversity issues are addressed in the work of social care practitioners. There were no areas for priority action, but some areas for development include improving clarity amongst agencies about when to refer a child to social care services and the development and use of common approaches to the assessment of children's needs. The local authority report that progress has already been made in these areas.

More children are achieving good levels of development at the end of their Reception Year at school than previously and performance is now broadly in line with similar areas, although low in comparison to the national average. Local data suggest there has been further improvement in 2010. Results for 11-year-olds improved for the fourth year running in 2009 and outcomes are in line with the average in similar areas. There was a further reduction in the number of primary schools not meeting the required standards in these tests. Provisional data show results for 11-year-olds are the same in 2010. Results for 16-year-olds are improving at a faster pace in Southwark than the average in similar areas, albeit from a low base. In 2009 more young people got five good GCSEs including English and mathematics than previously and performance was broadly in line with the average in similar areas. Provisional GCSE results show significant further improvement in 2010. The local authority continues to work to support the most vulnerable groups in achieving good educational outcomes and have had success in raising the attainment of pupils from lower-income families and in narrowing the gap between them and their peers. There has been a further reduction in the number of young people with poor attendance at secondary schools and performance is better than in similar areas.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have further developed over the last year and there are now better opportunities such as the new youth councils. The large majority of settings and

services are good at helping children get involved in decision making and having a say in how things are done. Ensuring fewer young people are involved in crime is an appropriate priority within local plans. The youth offending service is performing adequately against national performance measures and has good capacity and capability to sustain and improve its performance. More young offenders are now in work, education or training than before and performance is in line with the average for similar areas.

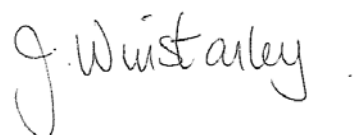
Increasing numbers of young people, including those from low-income backgrounds, are gaining five good GCSEs or two A levels or equivalent qualifications by the age of 19. Year-on-year improvement has been at a faster pace than the average for similar areas. For this age group, performance is above average at GCSE level. In 2010, while there was a slight reduction in the numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 not in work, education or training, performance is still below the average for similar areas. The local college is now satisfactory following an inadequate inspection in 2008. The college is making a good contribution to reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training by better meeting the needs of those that have not traditionally gone into further education.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners have a clear vision and high ambitions which are set out in the new Children and Young People's Plan 2010–2013. Work on the latest plan has further improved partnership working between agencies through an increased understanding and sharing of the key issues for children and young people and their families in the area. Priorities within the new plan are appropriate and include challenging but much needed areas of work such as raising the overall quality of educational provision, and reducing childhood obesity and the number of young people not in work, education or training. Improvements in partnership working are helping to make best use of resources, ensure value for money and contribute to better outcomes for children. In children's social care, recruitment and retention strategies are helping to create a stable workforce and to reduce the turnover of staff within the service.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment