

9 December 2010

Ms Lesley Heale
Director for People
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
PO Box 20, Council House
Solihull
West Midlands B91 9QU

Dear Mrs Heale

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.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
--------------------------------	-------------------

Children's services in Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of early years provision is at least good, although there is a small proportion of inadequate childminder, childcare and early years education settings. Provision in primary and secondary schools is good overall, with a very large majority of secondary schools judged to be at least good in their most recent inspection. However, one secondary school and one primary school were judged to be inadequate in the academic year 2009/2010. Three of the five special schools and two of the three pupil referral units are good. Provision for 16- to 18-year-old students is good in the further education and sixth form colleges but is more variable in school sixth forms, with under half judged to be good or better in Ofsted inspections. The local authority fostering agency was judged to be good at its most recent inspection and the adoption agency adequate.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found some areas for development and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show a very large majority of outcomes, including those for educational attainment, are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas at the ages of 11, 16 and 19. At the end of the Reception Year children do better than the average for similar areas, and at the age of 11 they do slightly better than in similar local authorities. GCSE results at the age of 16 are near the average for similar local authorities, as are the percentage of young people who gain qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs or two A levels by the age of 19. However, the number of young offenders who continue in education, training or work is below that found in similar areas and in the bottom 25% of local authorities nationally.

Key areas for further development

- Increase the amount of good post-16 provision in secondary and special schools.
- Increase the proportion of young offenders who are involved in education, training or work.

Outcomes for children and young people

Provision to support children and young people in living healthy lives is good or better in the very large majority of inspected settings and services. Health outcomes are generally in line or better than those in similar areas and found nationally.

Breast-feeding rates at six to eight weeks from birth are similar to the England average. The take-up of school lunches is in line with that in similar areas in both primary and secondary schools. Obesity rates are also in line with similar areas for six- and 11-year-olds. Children's level of participation in high quality physical activity and sport has continued to rise in line with the national trend. In a recent national survey, children and young people rated their emotional health similarly to the rest of the country. Steps have been taken to strengthen services for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties.

The large majority of services and settings make a good contribution to keeping children and young people safe. When measured against national indicators recent performance is generally in line with performance nationally and in similar areas. The joint area review in 2008 judged safeguarding in Solihull to be good, supported by good partnership working and an extensive range of multi-agency provision to provide early support for young people and their families. The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found that strong leadership and internal evaluation of the referral and assessment process has improved ways of working. Social workers receive good induction and training. The report also highlighted that some initial assessments of children's needs take too long to complete and that high caseloads and interim management arrangements are placing pressure on social workers and managers. The number of children and young people seriously injured or killed on the roads is reducing at the same rate to similar areas and the number of hospital admissions for unintentional or deliberate injuries is significantly lower than found nationally. The joint area review 2008 reported that provision and outcomes for looked after children and young people were good, including outstanding services to prevent family breakdown and to avoid children becoming looked after.

The very large majority of inspected settings and services are good at helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve. Educational standards at the ages of 11 and 16 have improved over the last five years and are broadly average when compared to those in similar areas, though targets for 16-year-olds were not met in 2009. The proportion of young people achieving two good GCSE grades in science is better than in similar areas and in the top 25% of local authorities nationally. The quality of school provision as judged through inspection, has improved slightly in the last year and the two inadequate schools are now making satisfactory progress. Standards of behaviour in secondary schools are satisfactory when compared to similar areas, as are persistent absence rates which are reducing.

Processes for consultation with and involvement of children and young people, including groups whose circumstances have made them more vulnerable such as unaccompanied asylum-seekers and care leavers, are well-developed, enabling them to play an important role in shaping services. The proportion of young people involved in sport, cultural, recreational and volunteering activities is broadly similar to that in similar areas and found nationally. The rate of reduction in the under-18 conception rate is similar to the England average. After a rise in 2007, the rate of permanent exclusions from schools fell in 2008, and is now in line with the average

for similar local authorities. The rate of proven re-offending by young people is below the England average.

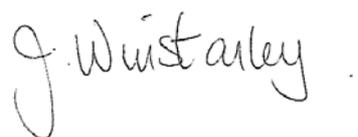
Young people are supported well across services and settings to do well in adult life. The quality of educational provision in the sixth form and further education colleges is good. However, provision in secondary and special school sixth forms is more variable, with under half judged good or better in Ofsted inspections. The proportion of young people in education, training or work after the age of 16, including care leavers, has remained steady over the last two years. However, fewer young offenders continue in education, training or work than in similar parts of the country. The proportion of young people who gain five or more good GCSEs, two A levels or their equivalent by the age of 19 is gradually increasing and is close to the average for similar areas. The proportion of young people from low-income backgrounds who progress to higher education is also close to the average for similar areas. The take-up of formal childcare by low-income families is better than in similar areas and found nationally.

Prospects for improvement

Many outcomes for children and young people are continuing to improve in Solihull. In the Children and Young People's Plan the local authority and its partners have identified eight key priorities, based on a detailed analysis of performance and consultation with children, parents and the community. These priorities include a focus on safeguarding, raising achievement for all and providing an equal chance for children from the groups whose circumstances have made them more vulnerable. While the local authority and its partners have been successful in improving most universal provision such as schools, some provision for those whose circumstances have made them more vulnerable is less consistently good. The Children and Young People's Plan identifies clearly the specific areas for continuing work, such as raising further the educational achievement of young people at the ages of 16 and 19 and reducing inequalities.

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 small flourish at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment