

9 December 2010

Ms Clair Pyper
Strategic Director of Education and Children Services
Slough Borough Council
Town Hall, Bath Road
Slough
Berkshire SL1 3UQ

Dear Ms Pyper

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.

Slough Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Slough Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better. This reflects the local authority's strong performance of previous years. Secondary schools, post-16 education provision, children's homes and nursery schools are major strengths with almost all provision judged good or better. The pupil referral unit is outstanding, but the quality of provision in special schools is uneven with one judged outstanding, one good and one satisfactory. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are both good. The quality of childcare has improved over last year and is now good overall. However, over a third of childminders are only satisfactory. Primary schools remain the weakest area of provision locally. While just over half are good or better, one in three schools are only satisfactory and four are now inadequate. Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe and achieve well in their education are good or better in the very large majority of services.

The 2010 unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified a broad balance of strengths and areas for improvement and no areas for priority action. The work of the local authority to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements is satisfactory.

The large majority of national performance measures show that outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. However performance against the main measures of educational attainment is polarised. Progress measures in primary school and test results for 11-year-olds are consistently below average for similar areas, albeit with some recent improvement. This contrasts sharply with examination results for 16- and 19-year-olds which are well above average and improving at a faster rate than elsewhere. The local authority has been successful in narrowing the gap in attainment between young people from low-income families and the majority at the age of 16, but the picture is not yet as good for those with special educational needs at this age.

Key areas for further development

- Improve educational outcomes for 11-year-olds.
- Improve educational outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs.
- Improve primary schools so that more are good or better.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are good or better in the very large majority of settings. Services to support children and young people with mental or emotional health difficulties have been strengthened. The area has seen a significant reduction in the number of young women under the age of 18 who get pregnant. The local authority and its partners recognise the need for more sexual health services in schools. The number of young people screened for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted infection, is well below the average for similar areas and amongst the worst performance seen nationally. Strategies to tackle childhood obesity are having some success. The number of children who are seriously overweight is below average for 11-year-olds, but above for five-year-olds.

Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe are good in the very large majority of settings and services. Ofsted inspections of childcare, schools and social care provision confirm this. The inspection of front-line child protection services identified robust performance management among the key strengths. These services meet the cultural, ethnic and religious needs of the community well. Highly motivated staff are supported by knowledgeable, experienced and accessible managers. Inspectors identified two key areas for development: some assessments lacked sufficient analysis and caseloads across the duty and assessment team were variable and in some incidences high. Managers are aware of this and are increasing resources to ensure there is sufficient capacity to respond to the changes in demand for services. The most recent data show an improvement in the number of assessments completed on time. Over the last year, the stability of placements for children in care has deteriorated and is now well below average.

Early years settings, schools, colleges and social care provision are good at helping children and young people do well educationally and enjoy their learning. Behaviour in secondary schools is good. The number of children with poor school attendance and the number excluded from school are consistently well below average. Children in the Reception year of school do as well as the average for similar areas, but attainment starts to tail off as they progress through primary school. Although unvalidated data in 2010 suggest improvement for 11-year-olds, performance in previous years has been well below average. Slough's good secondary schools help young people make up the lost ground and, by the age of 16, the number gaining five or more good GCSEs is well above average. The local authority has been successful in narrowing the gap in attainment between young people from low-income families and the majority at the age of 16. However, the picture for those with special educational needs at this age is not yet as good with a wider gap than the average in similar areas and fluctuation over recent years.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services are well established. The very large majority of settings and services are good at helping children get involved in decision-making. The number of young people taking part in organised leisure activities outside of school is well above average, and the numbers who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently is

well below. Re-offending by young people in Slough is comparable with similar areas; however young offenders are less likely to be in education, training or work and to have somewhere to live which meets their needs. The most recent local data suggest notable improvement on both these measures.

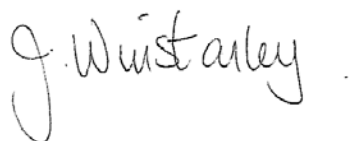
Children and young people receive very good support in schools and colleges to gain the skills and qualifications they need for adult life. Post-16 education provision is a major strength with all institutions judged good or better. The number of young people staying on in education and training beyond the compulsory school-leaving age is well above the average for similar areas. By the age of 19, the number gaining qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs, or two A-levels, is also well above the average and improving year on year. The performance of young people from low-income families is amongst the best seen nationally for this group. Outcomes for care leavers improved markedly last year with the very large majority in education, training or work and all having a place to live that meets their needs. The number of families on a low income using funding available for childcare has been well below average for some years.

Prospects for improvement

Children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. The local authority has a strong track record of improving outcomes for children and young people and knows that challenges remain: for example in raising standards in primary schools and strengthening further the capacity of child protection services. Partners share a clear vision and high ambitions which are set out in local plans and the Children's Charter. Planning is rooted firmly in a comprehensive understanding of local needs. Good partnership work is helping services respond effectively and flexibly to the diverse and well-established communities in Slough, as well as the needs of children and families who have moved into the area in recent years. The pressure on school places and related services presents particular demands which the local authority and its partners continue to manage well together.

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