

9 December 2010

Ms Sheila Smith
Director of Children and Young People Services
North Somerset Council
Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road
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Dear Ms Smith

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.

North Somerset Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in North Somerset Council perform excellently. In 2009, a transitional year, they were assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is enough good provision to meet the minimum requirements for the higher grade.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and there is very little inadequate provision. The overall quality of education and day-care provision for very young children is good, as are primary and secondary schools. Pupil referral units and school sixth forms are outstanding and the one further education college is good. However, only one of the three special schools is good. The local authority's fostering service is outstanding and its adoption service is good.

The local authority's front-line child protection services have a broad balance of strengths and areas needing development. It takes satisfactory steps to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

Performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes all the main measures of educational attainment. Test and exam results at all ages are broadly in line with the average in similar areas, but with a generally disappointing improvement record over recent years. At ages 11 and 19, but not at 16, children and young people from low-income families achieve significantly better than the average for this group elsewhere. The achievement in national tests of those with special educational needs is about average at age 11 but much better at 16.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of special schools.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. The proportion of children who are seriously overweight at age five is well below the average for similar areas and has improved since 2008 by more than the national average. However, the proportion of children who are seriously overweight at age 11 is just above average and has gone up by more than found nationally. The number of children and young people who regularly take part in sport is broadly average. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is higher than the average for similar areas and has gone up in recent years. The overall reduction over the last decade has been modest, which is similar to the national picture. Good progress has been made in developing comprehensive provision for those with emotional and mental health difficulties.

The very large majority of individual services like schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. The local authority's front-line child protection services have a broad balance of strengths and areas needing development. Good progress has been made in improving multi-agency working and, in particular, in improving both the early identification of problems and the provision of support before they become very serious. Lessons from reviews of death or serious injury to children are disseminated well. There is some effective work to prevent young people from having to come into care. The local authority's fostering service is outstanding and its adoption service is good. However, the frequency of placement change for children in care is only broadly in line with the average nationally. There has been good progress over the last few years in reducing the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents but not in reducing serious injuries more generally. The number of children and young people who say they have been bullied is higher than the average in similar areas.

The overall quality of day-care provision for very young children is good and significantly better than the national average. Education provision for this group is also good. Primary and secondary schools are good and pupil referral units outstanding. All three kinds of provision are significantly better than found nationally. There is very little inadequate provision. Test and exam results at ages six, 11 and 16 are broadly in line with the average in similar areas. The attainment of five-year-olds has improved substantially over recent years. However, attainment at age 11 has not improved at all and at 16 it has improved by significantly less than attainment nationally. Also, the number of primary schools failing to meet minimum requirements for pupil attainment has gone up, although there are now no secondary schools in this category, and there is one inadequate primary school, whereas last year there were none. At age 11 children and young people from low-income families achieve significantly better than the average for this group in similar areas. Very substantial progress has been made in improving their performance at this age and the gap between them and other children has gone down a lot. However, the opposite is true at age 16, where these young people do significantly worse than the average elsewhere, performance has declined and the gap has widened. The performance in national tests of those with special educational needs is about average at age 11 but much better at 16. However, special schools are the one area where the quality of local provision overall is below the national average. One of the three schools is good but the other two only satisfactory. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests.

Behaviour in secondary schools is very good and the number of permanent exclusions is low. The proportion of children and young people who participate in organised group activities outside school is well above the average in similar areas and the number who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently is well below. Re-offending by young people is higher than in similar areas, although the youth offending service works reasonably well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services to seek children and young people's views and involve them in decision making.

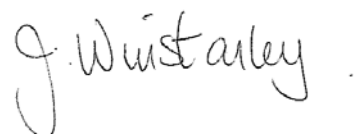
The very large majority of services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. All school sixth forms are good or better and the one further education college is good. The proportion of young people staying on in education or training when they reach school leaving age is better than the average in similar areas and the number aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training is much better. The number achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs by age 19 is above the average in similar areas, as is the number achieving qualifications equal to two good A levels. The rate of improvement over recent years has been similar to the national average in both respects. Young people from low-income families do much better than the same group elsewhere on the five GCSE measure and also better, but less so, on the two A-level measure. Better progress has been made than found nationally in recent years in improving the performance of this group and in narrowing the gap with other young people.

Prospects for improvement

The recent track record of improvement in the generally strong areas of early years and school provision is a mixed one. There has been an improvement overall in the proportion of provision judged to be good or better and this is particularly so for secondary schools and pupil referral units. However, there has also been an increase in primary schools not meeting minimum requirements and there is now one inadequate school. Similarly, whilst children's achievement at age five has improved, at age 11 it has gone down and at age 16 it has improved significantly less than found nationally. In other areas of performance the improvement picture has also been mixed. The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs, not least because great efforts are made to obtain the views of children and young people themselves and their parents. This knowledge is used to set clear and appropriate improvement priorities. Considerable work has gone into restructuring services to improve their coordination and to ensure that they intervene earlier and more effectively where problems are developing. This has been a challenging process but one which is beginning to bear fruit.

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 cursive script that reads "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment