

9 December 2010

Ms Jane Porter
Acting Director of Children's Services
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Westox House, 1 Trinity Road
Dudley, West Midlands DY1 1JQ

Dear Ms Porter

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.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

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

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of early years settings are good, as are all seven local authority special schools and two of its four pupil referral units. However, provision in a half of the local authority primary schools is only adequate. During the academic year 2009/2010, four primary schools and two secondary schools were judged to be inadequate. Provision for students aged 16 to 18 is good in the further education and sixth form colleges, and in special schools. However, only one of the three school sixth forms was judged to be good at its most recent inspection, and the others are both only satisfactory. The local authority adoption service is good as are all of the local authority's children's homes. The local authority fostering service is satisfactory.

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

National performance measures show the large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England and for similar areas. The very large majority of educational outcomes are in line with similar areas at the age of 11, 16 and 19. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are in education, training or work is above that in similar areas, though care leavers are under represented in this group. The percentage of 11-year-olds who are very overweight is higher than in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Increase the number of primary schools that are good or better.
- Improve the quality of sixth form provision in schools.
- Continue to focus on reducing levels of obesity.

Outcomes for children and young people

Provision to support children in living healthy lives is good or better in the majority of inspected settings and services. Health outcomes are generally in line with those in similar areas and found nationally. Breast-feeding rates at six to eight weeks from birth are lower than the England average. The take-up of school lunches is below the average for similar areas in secondary schools and obesity rates are have risen slightly among 11-year-olds in the last year to above the level for similar areas. Children's level of participation in physical activity and sport has continued to rise in line with the national trend and is similar to that elsewhere. In a recent national survey, the proportion of children and young people who described their relationship

with friends and family as good is better than in similar parts of the country. Sound progress has been made in moving towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service.

The large majority of individual services or settings make a good contribution to keeping children and young people safe, including those placed in the care of the local authority. When measured against national indicators Dudley's performance is generally in line with performance nationally. The recent unannounced inspection of child protection services highlighted as strengths the prompt prioritisation of child protection cases by experienced and qualified social workers, and improved collaboration with the police on domestic violence referrals. Areas identified for development include the need to improve the speed in allocation of cases requiring an initial assessment, the quality of performance management information, and improving the quality of supervision of social workers. The number of children and young people seriously injured or killed on the roads is reducing more slowly than in similar areas. The local authority and its partners information about children who run away from home or care overnight and the provision and procedures for responding to their needs are not as well develop as the average seen nationally.

Provision to help children and young people achieve educationally and to enjoy learning is good or better in the large majority of inspected settings and services. The proportion of early years settings judged to be good or better in inspection is higher than in similar areas. However, at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage children's achievement remains considerably lower than that in similar areas. By the end of their primary education, children's achievement has improved to be in line with that found nationally and in similar local authorities. Secondary education achievement remains in line with the rest of England. However, more than half of primary schools are judged to be only satisfactory in inspection. This compares poorly with secondary schools where two-thirds are good or better. Four primary schools and two secondary schools were judged to be inadequate during 2009/2010. One of these secondary schools closed at the end of August 2010. The number of primary and secondary schools which fail to meet minimum standards has fallen steadily over the last four years. Behaviour in secondary schools is satisfactory, as are persistent absence rates, which are reducing.

Children and young people are supported well to make a positive contribution to services through consultation and participation, including the Children in Care Council and the engagement of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Examples include involvement in the commissioning of services and in the design of youth and play provision. The proportion of young people involved in sporting, cultural, recreational and volunteering activities is similar to that in similar areas. Whilst the figure for young women under the age of 18 becoming pregnant is greater than the national average, it is reducing at a faster rate than nationally. The local authority acknowledges the challenge it still faces to meet targets. Rates of permanent exclusions from schools have fallen since 2005 to broadly in line with similar areas and that found nationally. The rate of proven re-offending by young people is below the England average.

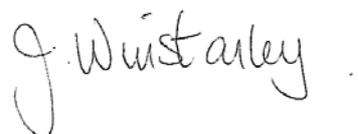
Children and young people get good support from the majority of settings and services to do well in adult life. The quality of educational provision in further education and sixth form colleges, and in special school sixth forms, is good, though more variable in secondary school sixth forms. The proportion of young people gaining higher level qualifications by the age of 19 continues to improve and is now slightly better than in similar areas. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds in education, training or work continues to improve and is better than the average for similar areas. This success is underpinned by good partnerships, high quality support and rigorous tracking of young people's progress. However, the proportion of care leavers who continue into work, education or training is still lower than in similar areas and has been identified as a target for improvement in the coming year. The take-up of formal childcare by low-income families compares poorly with the national average.

Prospects for improvement

Many outcomes for children and young people are continuing to improve in Dudley. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress against a number of indicators and highlights key priorities for improvement. These include increasing the achievement of groups whose circumstances have made them more vulnerable, further improvement of safeguarding and promoting advocacy for young people. However, too many primary schools are only satisfactory and more schools have been judged inadequate in the last year. The quality of challenge and support for those schools recently judged to be inadequate is satisfactory overall, and the inconsistency in the performance of primary schools has been identified as a priority area of work.

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