

9 December 2010

Ms Anne Whiteley
Director of Children's Services
Devon County Council
Room 126, County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter, Devon EX2 4QG

Dear Ms Whiteley

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.

Devon's County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Devon County Council perform well. In 2009, a transitional year, they were assessed as performing adequately. However, in 2010 there is enough good provision to meet the minimum requirements for the higher grade.

Overall, the very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. There have been improvements in most aspects of provision since last year, particularly secondary schools and pupil referral units. The overall quality of day care for very young children is outstanding. Primary schools, secondary schools, pupil referral units and further education colleges are good but special schools only adequate and school sixth forms poor. All the local authority's children's homes are good. The local authority's adoption service is outstanding and the fostering service is good.

Safeguarding services overall are adequate and for children in care they are good. The local authority's front-line child protection services have a broad balance of strengths and areas for improvement.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes all the main measures of educational attainment. The local figures for test and examination results are broadly in line with the average in similar areas at all ages, but compare most favourably at the age of 11. Rates of improvement in each case over recent years have been below the national average, particularly at the age of 16 and 19. Throughout their education children and young people from low-income families achieve broadly in line with the average for this group elsewhere. The gap between their performance and other 16-year-olds has widened significantly in recent years, but at the age of 19 it has narrowed. The achievement in national tests of those with special educational needs is significantly better than average.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of school sixth forms.
- Narrow the gap between the educational performance of young people from low income families and others at the age of 16.

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. However, there has been relatively slow progress in developing comprehensive provision for those with emotional and mental health difficulties. Improving children and young people's mental health is currently a priority for local services and there has been some improvement in provision to

identify and help with problems early, before they become very serious. The number of children who are seriously overweight at the age of five and 11 are broadly in line with the averages for similar areas, but have risen in recent years with a worse trend than nationally. The number of children and young people regularly taking part in sport is significantly above the national average. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is a little above the average in similar areas and the figure has gone up in the last few years. The overall reduction over the last decade has been very modest and significantly worse than the national picture.

Provision for safeguarding is adequate overall. The very large majority of individual services like schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe, and the local authority's front-line child protection services have a broad balance of strengths and areas for improvement. There has been some improvement since safeguarding provision was judged to be inadequate in 2006, although the pace of change overall has been relatively modest. Steps are being taken to improve multi-agency working and, in particular, to improve both the early identification of problems and the provision of support before they become very serious. Provision for children in care is good. Support is well coordinated and its effectiveness closely monitored. All the local authority's children's homes are good. The local authority's adoption service is outstanding and its fostering service is good. When it buys extra help of this kind from private and voluntary organisations this is also good. Improving the educational attainment of children in care is a key priority. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has gone up in recent years, but progress has been made in reducing the overall number of serious injuries.

The quality of day care for very young children compares very well with the national average. Primary schools, including nursery education provision, are good overall and close to the average. Secondary schools and pupil referral unit provision are also good overall but rather better than the average. There have been improvements in most aspects of provision since last year, particularly secondary schools and pupil referral units. However, six primary and two secondary schools failed their last inspection, an increase of one secondary school from last year. Assessments of children's development at the age of five and test and examination results at the age of 11 and 16 are all broadly in line with the average in similar areas. Rates of improvement over recent years have been a little below the national picture at the age of 11 but more so at the age of 16. Throughout their education children and young people from low-income families achieve broadly in line with the average for this group elsewhere. Comparatively good progress has been made in improving their performance at the age of 11 but much less so at the age of 16 where the gap between them and other pupils has widened substantially. The achievement in national tests of those with special educational needs is significantly better than the average elsewhere, particularly at the age of 11. However, the overall quality of special school provision is only adequate. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests.

Re-offending by young people is slightly better than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well. The very large majority of services have good arrangements to seek young people's views and involve them in decision-making.

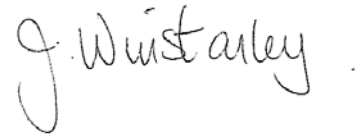
The large majority of services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. Whilst the overall standard of sixth forms is significantly lower than the national average, one of the three main further education colleges is outstanding, one is good and one is satisfactory. This is broadly in line overall with the standard of college provision nationally, although provision in the four small independent specialist colleges is weaker. The seven colleges cater for just over 60% of the young people in the 16 to 19 age group who are in education and training. The great majority of these attend the two biggest colleges, one of which is outstanding and the other good. The number of young people who stay on in education or training when they reach school leaving age and the number of 16- to 18-year-olds involved in education, work or training are both very close to the average in similar areas. The proportion achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs by the age of 19 is close to the average in similar areas. The proportion achieving qualifications equal to two good A levels is lower. The rate of improvement over recent years has been less than nationally in both cases. However, the performance gap between young people from low-income families and others has narrowed.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners have improved safeguarding provision since it was judged to be inadequate in 2006. However, by 2009 it had only reached the level of adequate and in some aspects the required level of improvement had only just been satisfactorily achieved. The recent inspection of the local authority's front-line child protection services identified strengths but also a number of aspects where improvement still needed to be made. There is a good grasp of what needs to be done, appropriate structures are in place, and partnership working between the key agencies has improved. In other service areas there are both strengths and weaknesses in the record of delivering improvement. For example, the quality of secondary schools and short stay units has improved significantly, but increases in tests and examination results have mostly not kept pace with the national averages. The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs and use this to set clear and appropriate improvement priorities. There is good awareness of what needs to be done, for example to improve multi-agency working, and there has been some good progress in such respects. The joint commissioning of services is a particular strength.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment