

9 December 2010

Dr Carol Tozer
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Dear Dr Tozer

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.

Torbay Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Torbay Borough Council perform poorly. In 2009 they performed well. However, during the year an inspection of the local authority's front-line child protection services found serious weaknesses requiring urgent remedial action. A subsequent inspection of safeguarding provision judged it to be inadequate overall. The same inspection judged provision for looked after children to be adequate.

Overall, the very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The quality of education and day-care provision for very young children is outstanding. Primary schools are adequate but secondary and special schools are good, as is the one pupil referral unit. Education provision for 16- to 19-year-olds, both in school sixth forms and the one further education college, is outstanding. The local authority's fostering service is good and its adoption service satisfactory.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes nearly all of the main measures of educational attainment. At ages 11 and 19 attainment is in line with the average in similar areas and at age 16 it is well above. The rates of improvement at ages 11 and 16 over recent years have been broadly comparable to the national picture, albeit with better than average improvement in both cases between 2007/8 and 2008/9. Provisional figures for age 11 in 2009/10 also show a significant improvement. However, at age 19 the rate of improvement has been somewhat below average. Throughout their education 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 worse than the average elsewhere at age 11 but significantly better at 16. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is very high and has gone up very substantially over the last decade, particularly in recent years.

Key areas for further development

- Improve safeguarding provision, including front-line child protection services.
- Reduce the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant.

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 close to the average for similar areas but at age 11 it is much lower. However, the rate of increase in the former figure over the last two years has been substantial and contrary to the national trend. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is very much higher than the average for similar areas and has gone up substantially over the last decade, particularly in recent years. This is a much worse picture than found nationally. Reasonable progress has been made in developing comprehensive provision for those with emotional and mental health difficulties, albeit from a low base some years ago.

A recent inspection of the local authority's front-line child protection services found serious weaknesses requiring urgent remedial action. These weaknesses included both the initial assessment of children's needs and the management of cases thereafter. A subsequent inspection of safeguarding provision found this to be inadequate overall, with some children and young people being left at risk of significant harm. Although the contribution of other agencies needs some improvement, the main weaknesses focus on the local authority's social care service for children and young people. The very large majority of services such as schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. The local authority also takes good measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements. Provision for children in care is adequate overall. Statutory requirements are met and there have been improvements in some outcomes, for example longer care placements on average and fewer exclusions of children in care from school. The local authority buys places in a number of private and voluntary sector children's homes and these are almost all good. The local authority's fostering service is good and its adoption service satisfactory. Outcomes for care leavers are outstanding. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has fluctuated very substantially in recent years as has the number of serious injuries to young people more generally. The number of children and young people who say they have been bullied is close to the average in similar areas.

The overall quality of education and day-care provision for very young children is outstanding and well above the national average. Primary schools are adequate and close to the average nationally. Secondary schools are good overall and much better than nationally. The one pupil referral unit is also good. There has been a small reduction in the overall quality of early years and primary school provision over the last year and there has also been an increase from one to two in the number of inadequate primary schools. However, there has been a significant improvement over the same period in the overall quality of secondary schools. Children's achievement at age five in 2008/9 was well below the average for similar areas, following a sharp dip from the previous year. However, provisional figures for 2009/10 show a significant improvement. At age 11 attainment is in line with the average for similar areas, with comparatively good pupil progress between ages seven and 11. At age 16, attainment is well above the similar area average. The rates of improvement at ages 11 and 16 over recent years have been broadly

comparable to the national picture, albeit with better than average improvement in both cases between 2007/8 and 2008/9. Provisional figures for age 11 in 2009/10 also show a significant improvement. Throughout their education children and young people from low-income families achieve significantly better than the average for this group elsewhere. Good progress has been made in improving their performance at both ages 11 and 16 and the gap between them and other children and young people has narrowed. In 2008/9 the achievement in national tests of children and young people with special educational needs was significantly better than the average elsewhere at age 16 but worse at age 11. However, provisional figures for 2009/10 show a significant improvement in the latter figure. The quality of special schools is good overall. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take the national tests.

The proportion of children and young people involved in organised group activities outside school is close to the average in similar areas, as is the number who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently. Re-offending by young people is comparable with that in similar areas and the youth offending service works reasonably well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services 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. The overall quality of school sixth forms has improved over the last year and is well above the national average. Three sixth forms are outstanding, as is the local further education college. The proportion of young people staying on in education or training when they reach school leaving age is close to the average in similar areas. However, the proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training is well above. By age 19 the numbers of young people achieving qualifications equal to five good GCSEs and to two good A levels are very close to the similar area averages. However, the rate of improvement over recent years has been less than the national average in both cases. Young people from low-income families do much better than the same group elsewhere on both these key measures. The recent rate of improvement has been better than nationally and the gap between these young people and others in the local area has narrowed.

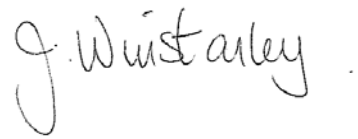
Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners have, in the main, a good grasp of local needs, not least because extensive measures are taken to obtain the views of young people themselves. This knowledge is used to set clear and appropriate improvement priorities. There is good awareness of what needs to be done, for example to improve social work practice and multi-agency working to identify and deal with problems early. However, the full inspection of safeguarding in September 2010 found that, although there was a comprehensive improvement plan, the local authority had not made sufficient progress in tackling the weaknesses identified in its front-line child protection services by the unannounced inspection in May 2010. It has also been unsuccessful in reducing the very high, and still increasing, rate of teenage pregnancy. Its current capacity to improve safeguarding provision is inadequate, with performance management at all levels a particular weakness. Its

capacity to improve services for children in care is adequate. In other respects the recent track record of improvement is mixed. For example, the local authority has a good recent track record of improving the quality of provision in secondary schools but has not made sufficient progress in improving its primary schools.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment