

9 December 2010

Dr Peter Simpson and Mr Stephen Richards
Joint Acting Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Learning
London Borough of Sutton
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Dear Dr Simpson and Mr Richards

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.

The London Borough of Sutton children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Sutton perform excellently. This shows improvement from 2009 when services performed well.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and little is inadequate. Since the 2009 assessment, the overall effectiveness of childminder and childcare settings has improved significantly and is good. A very large majority of nurseries and early years education in primary schools are good or better. The quality of primary schools has improved and is satisfactory overall, although one school is inadequate. Secondary schools are strong with all but one of the 14 schools good or better. Pupil referral units and special schools are good, although one special school was inadequate during the assessment period. Fostering and adoption agencies are good. School sixth forms are mostly good or better and the general further education college satisfactory. The only children's home in the borough was judged inadequate; it was privately run and has now closed.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong with some areas for development and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes for children and young people to be in line with or better than comparators. The very large majority of educational attainment indicators are also above comparators. Children and young people do very well in their early years and in national tests for 11- and 16-year-olds. Fewer young people than average are not in education, employment or training and they do very well in the qualifications they achieve by the age of 19. Children and young people from families with low incomes do better than in similar parts of the country and this is particularly evident at the ages of 16 and 19. Attainment gaps are also beginning to narrow. Children and young people with special educational needs do much better in national tests for 16-year-olds than similar young people elsewhere and the standards they achieve are improving.

Key areas for further development

- Improve primary schools so that more are good or better.
- Narrow attainment gaps between children and young people from families with low incomes and others of the same age further.

Outcomes for children and young people

Inspected services are consistently good or better at encouraging children and young people to adopt healthy lifestyles. Actions to encourage children and young people to take part in physical activities and sports have been particularly successful. They appreciate the parks and playgrounds provided and make good use of them. Numbers of children who are too overweight are the same as in similar areas, but reducing. Numbers of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant are relatively low, but have increased recently. Good progress has been made in developing emotional and mental health services to support children and young people when they are troubled and more support is now available for children in care.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always effective, although childminders are not quite as strong overall. The 2008 joint area review judged safeguarding as good and the recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services concluded that services work together well to safeguard children and young people. Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe in their communities are mostly effective. Levels of bullying are far lower than elsewhere and reducing, as are numbers of children admitted to hospital as a result of unintentional or deliberate injuries. There has however been a recent increase in children killed or injured in car accidents, although actual numbers are low and were previously reducing.

With the exception of the general further education college, which is satisfactory, all other institutions and services have been judged by inspectors to help children and young people achieve and enjoy their learning very well. Children do much better than elsewhere by the age of five and standards achieved in national tests by 11- and 16-year-olds are very high and improving. Actions taken by the authority to improve the quality of primary schools have been successful and there are no longer any schools which are not achieving the minimum standards for pupil performance. Nevertheless, too many primary schools remain just satisfactory. Children and young people from low-income families achieve higher standards in national tests than elsewhere. There has been some progress recently in narrowing the gap between these young people and their peers in the borough. Children and young people with special educational needs do better than elsewhere and the standards they achieve are improving. All secondary schools have good or better behaviour and the numbers of young people with poor attendance are low.

Arrangements for encouraging children and young people to become involved in their communities are consistently good, other than for one satisfactory pupil referral unit. High and increasing numbers of young people are involved in organised activities in their local communities. Slightly fewer children than in similar areas are permanently excluded from school, with a further reduction last year. The number of young people who commit crimes for the first time have reduced significantly and fewer re-offend than in similar areas. All have suitable places to live and numbers in education, work or training are much improved and better than in similar parts of the country.

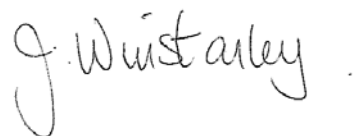
Schools and colleges are consistently good or better in helping children and young people develop the knowledge and skills required for working life. Numbers of young people who are not in education, work or training have reduced steadily and are much lower than for the country overall. Local authority data also show significant recent improvement for young people leaving the care of the authority. Care leavers who have suitable places to live fluctuate from year to year but remain in line with similar areas. Overall, 19-year-olds achieve far more qualifications than in similar parts of the country. Those from families with low incomes also do better and they are beginning to catch up with their peers in the borough.

Prospects for improvement

Outcomes for children and young people are improving and the previous high standards maintained. Recent unvalidated data for 2010 show further improvement in standards for 11-year-olds, with no difference between boys and girls. Reducing the impact of poverty and deprivation is a priority for the authority. Analysis of needs are detailed and have been used well to develop a comprehensive Children and Young People's Plan, which focuses on improving outcomes for underachieving and groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. The review of this plan is self-critical and sets out appropriate priorities for further work. Since the 2008 joint area review, much has been done to ensure children and young people can express their views including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. The youth offending service is performing well and has strong capacity to sustain and improve its performance. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found well established inter-agency working and an excellent range of services for children with disabilities.

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