

9 December 2010

Mr Anthony May
Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services
Nottinghamshire County Council
County Hall, West Bridgford
Nottingham
Nottinghamshire NG2 7QP

Dear Mr May

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.

Nottinghamshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Nottinghamshire County Council perform poorly.

The 2010 children's service assessment is informed by an inspection that found inadequate arrangements for safeguarding children and young people. In November 2009 an unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services reported strengths in a strategic plan designed to address known weaknesses. However, a more recent full inspection identifies that insufficient improvement has been made leaving some of the most vulnerable children at risk. Services for children who need to be looked after by the local authority are adequate.

The majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, most childcare provision, nursery and primary schools are good, so too are all 11 local authority special schools and four of them are outstanding. Just over a half of children's homes are good or better. However, secondary schools and school sixth forms do not do as well. Inspections show that less than a half are good or better and four secondary schools are not providing a satisfactory quality of education. One of the further education colleges is outstanding and another good. The most recent inspections judged the adoption agency to be good and the local fostering agency adequate. Private fostering arrangements are outstanding.

National performance measures show a very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or similar areas. In primary schools a large majority of children make good progress in both English and mathematics. Results in national tests are above average for 11-year-olds. Although fewer 16-year-olds do as well as their peers elsewhere, attainment is rising every year and more achieve good grades in science than nationally. Nineteen-year-olds from all backgrounds do not gain as many qualifications as elsewhere but the latest results show a gradual improvement. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds in education, employment or training has been kept high in recent years although most recent figures show declining performance.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the overall effectiveness of arrangements for safeguarding.
- Improve secondary schools and school sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Increase the number of young people who gain qualifications at the age of 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are usually successful. Nearly all schools and children's homes are good at this. A key priority for the local authority and partners is to reduce health inequalities for children and young people in deprived areas of Nottinghamshire. Recent improvements include more children taking part in physical education and sport, and fewer children who are too overweight at the age of five and 11. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than nationally. Services for emotional and mental health are comprehensive and more parents of disabled children and young people report being satisfied with local services than found nationally.

A full inspection by Ofsted of local services for safeguarding identified important weaknesses in the arrangements to protect children at risk of harm. The thresholds for accessing specialist services are too high and some important assessments are taking longer to complete than found nationally. Most recent data illustrates a further decline in the number of initial and core assessments and child protection reviews completed within the expected timescales. Most children in care are in placements providing safe and consistent care. However, too few have plans for their welfare and progress reviewed within recommended timescales. Inspection of schools, children's homes and the local adoption agency confirm they usually have good arrangements for keeping children and young people safe. Multi-agency teams responsible for providing early support and preventing family breakdown are often effective. There are some strengths in the arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community: for example, reducing the number of children who are killed or seriously injured on the roads each year and the number saying that they feel bullied is no greater than elsewhere. Hospital admissions due to unintentional and deliberate injuries are reducing each year and are slightly lower than in similar areas.

Variation in how well schools and colleges do has been reported over time and this continues. Most childcarers, nursery and primary schools and colleges are good at ensuring children and young people enjoy learning and make good progress. Almost all special schools are good at this. However, secondary schools and the pupil referral units do not do as well. The number of secondary schools judged to be good or better is well below that seen elsewhere and, although improving quickly, standards continue to be below similar areas and the national average. However, the local authority is effective in its work to help schools improve; each year more schools are helping young people achieve five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics. This improvement is at a faster rate than elsewhere. Success in science subjects is better than elsewhere. As overall attainment in secondary schools improves, the gap in achievement with those from low-income families is getting wider. Results for children with special educational needs improve each year but they do not do as well as similar groups nationally. Behaviour is not good in as many secondary schools as in similar areas and the number of pupils who are often absent from school is higher than the national average.

Secure arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for some time. Most schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision-making and activity in their communities. Children in care are often involved in decisions that affect their lives and they contribute effectively in shaping local services. Rates of first-time offending are falling and are below similar areas. This is also the case for re-offending. The local authority identifies success in its approach to supporting young people misusing drugs and drink. In the last year more young people are accessing specialist treatment and alcohol-related admissions to hospital have decreased.

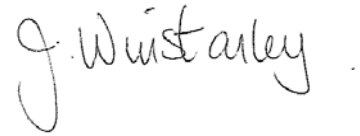
Although more young people each year gain good qualifications by the age of 19, attainment is still below similar areas and the national picture. The gap in the achievement of Level 3 qualifications of those from low-income families and their peers is closing more quickly than elsewhere. It is now in line with similar areas but wider than found nationally. Increasing numbers of young people choose to participate in education, employment or training when they reach school leaving age, although numbers decline as some drop out of their courses or placements by the age of 17. However, recent local authority data show that over time more 17-year-olds are continuing in education, employment or training and performance is better than in similar areas. There has been recent improvement in the number of care leavers in education, employment or training. The local authority has set ambitious targets to increase the participation of young people especially those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.

Prospects for improvement

Most outcomes, particularly those for health and educational attainment, are improving in Nottinghamshire. However, there are important weaknesses in social care outcomes. A safeguarding improvement programme plan addresses the concerns raised by the Ofsted inspection, including the introduction of new approaches for performance management and work force development. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan is detailed and demonstrates a good understanding of achievements to date and sets clear direction to address further improvement. Targets, always realistic and sometimes ambitious, inform future actions. Although strategic management, planning and policies were reported in the recent safeguarding inspection to be effective these are not consistently communicated, understood or delivered by operational staff, reducing the overall impact on outcomes. The local authority has been issued with a government Improvement Notice. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is providing timely and well judged challenge and a level of support that is valued by these 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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment