

9 December 2010

Miss Cynthia Welbourn
Corporate Director of Children's Services
North Yorkshire County Council
County Hall, Northallerton
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Dear Miss Welbourn

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.

North Yorkshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in North Yorkshire County Council perform well.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Almost all children's homes are good or better and there is no unsatisfactory provision. Over three quarters of post-16 education providers are good or better with the remainder being satisfactory, a very similar position to that for fostering and adoption services. The large majority of secondary schools are good or better although there is still one school that is inadequate. There is also one inadequate primary school, as opposed to none last year. However, there are now more primary schools that are good or outstanding. Two of the pupil referral units inspected are outstanding.

The unannounced inspection of front line child protection services in 2009 identified two areas for priority action. This was followed by a full announced inspection in which safeguarding services were judged to be adequate and services for looked after children to be good.

National performance indicators show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. The achievement of three- to five-year-olds continues to rise. In national tests, 11-year-olds achieve as well as their counterparts elsewhere but the proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five or more good GCSE passes has risen above the averages in similar areas and nationally. Sixteen-year-olds who receive free schools meals are performing increasingly less well than others of the same age. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training has fallen and there has been an increase in the proportion of 19-year-olds who have gained qualifications. The rate of re-offending amongst young people is higher than in similar areas. The proportion of young offenders in education, work or training has increased significantly but is still below average.

Key area for further improvement

- Raise the achievement of 16-year-olds who receive free school meals, so that they perform as well as others of the same age.
- Reduce the rate of re-offending by young people and increase their involvement in education, work or training in line with similar averages.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are very successful. All the special schools, children's homes, private and voluntary fostering and adoption provision are good or very good at this, as are the very large majority of child carers, primary and secondary schools. The local authority's fostering agency and one of the pupil referral units are only satisfactory in this respect. Improvements include: a rise in the take up of schools lunches; a reduction in the number of five- and 11-year-olds who are very overweight; and an increase in the proportion of children and young people who take part in physical activity and sport. However, on the basis of questionnaire returns made by primary carers, the emotional and behavioural health of children in care is below the national average.

A very large majority of settings make a good or better contribution to keeping children and young people safe. In September 2009, inspectors found that safeguarding services were adequate in terms of their overall effectiveness and capacity to improve. Services for looked after children are good in both respects. Inspectors commented on how quickly services had responded to the areas for priority action identified in a previous unannounced inspection. However, they highlighted the need for more consistency in the quality and timeliness of assessments and child protection investigations. They also identified the need to reduce the number of child protection plans lasting more than two years and in the number of children subject to such a plan more than once. However, whilst acknowledging the considerable increase in safeguarding activity overall, there is still some way to go. For example, the most recent figures show that the timeliness of initial assessments continues to be below the national average; there has been little change in the timeliness of core assessments and the timeliness of reviews of children in need has dropped.

The very large majority of settings make good or better provision to help children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. The achievement of three- to five-year-olds continues to rise in line with performance in similar areas. The progress that children make between the ages of seven and 11 is above average in mathematics and in line with similar areas in English. National test results for 11-year-olds remain in line with averages in similar areas. Eleven-year-olds in care achieve as well as their counterparts elsewhere but less well than others of the same age, particularly in mathematics. The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, has been above the averages for similar areas for the last four years. The same is true of the numbers gaining two or more good science grades at this level. However, young people receiving free school meals perform less well than other 16-year-olds and the gap between the two groups is widening. Behaviour is good or better in the large majority of secondary schools and, over the last four years, absence rates have fallen in line with those in similar areas.

The high quality of work across institutions, the extensive work of the youth service, the authority's Arts strategy and initiatives such as Play Builder have ensured that the number of young people involved in activities of benefit to themselves and others remains higher than in similar areas. However, the number of young people who say they have been drunk or taken drugs recently has risen. Arrangements for involving young people, including disabled children and those in care, in shaping services are well established and have been further strengthened through the establishment of the North Yorkshire Youth Council. The youth offending service in North Yorkshire works reasonably well but the number of young people who are caught breaking the law more than once is higher than in similar areas. The proportion of young offenders in education, work or training has increased significantly but is still below average.

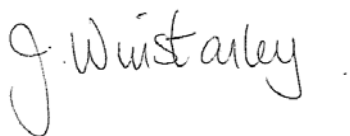
In the large majority of settings, young people receive high levels of support to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to get a job. The number of low-income families who take up their entitlement to childcare so that they can work has risen steadily, in line with the picture in similar areas. The number of care leavers who continue with their education or take up jobs has increased, as has the number of 19-year-olds who have the equivalent of five or more good passes at GCSE. The situation is similar for 19-year-olds with two A levels or the equivalent. The number of 16-year-olds not in education, work or training has fallen when, on average, it has risen in areas of a similar type.

Prospects for improvement

The authority has succeeded in maintaining its good performance. It has established more secure monitoring, management and funding arrangements to help improve the quality of its safeguarding arrangements. It has also provided appropriate support to schools found to be inadequate by Ofsted, in order to help them improve. The review of the Children and Young People's plan is concise and clear and includes a rigorous evaluation of progress, based on a detailed analysis of data and performance information, including feedback from users. The authority has identified the right priorities for development and has drawn up clear plans for building capacity further through 19 specific performance measures and targets which will be monitored in detail.

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