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Ms Denise Hyde
Director, Children and Young People's Service
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Dear Ms Hyde

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 Lincolnshire Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in North Lincolnshire Council perform adequately. In 2009, a transitional year, North Lincolnshire was assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is not enough good provision, particularly in universal services, to meet the minimum requirements for that grade.

The majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Special schools and pupil referral units are good, as are the further education and sixth form colleges. However, secondary schools and school sixth forms are not doing as well, and inspections show that only a third of secondary schools are good and three are inadequate. Just over half of childminders and childcare providers are good or better. The local fostering agency is satisfactory and the local adoption agency and three of the local authority's four children's homes are good.

The joint area review of February 2008 found that services for both safeguarding and children in care were good. An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in November 2010 found an area of strength and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests and examinations are below those of 11- and 16-year-olds in similar areas. The differences in attainment between children whose circumstances have made them more vulnerable and their peers are too wide at the age of 16. By the age of 19, young people in North Lincolnshire, including those from low-income families, gain a similar number of qualifications as those of their peers in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools and school sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Improve how well children do at the end of primary school.
- Maintain the momentum of improvement in examination results for 16-year-olds, including those from low-income families and those with special educational needs.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. Nearly all types of school, the sixth form college and the local fostering agency are good at this, although childminders, pupil referral units and one of the children's homes do not do as well. Parents of disabled children

report they are very satisfied with the services they receive. Improvements include the quality of services for children and young people with mental health or emotional difficulties, and fewer children who are too overweight at the age of five. The number of children taking part in sport regularly improved well in 2009, although not enough children think the local parks are good. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than nationally. There is a comparatively low rate of screening for chlamydia. Local knowledge of how many mothers are still breast-feeding their babies after the age of six weeks is not well developed.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in most services and settings. They are not quite as strong in the local fostering agency. The most recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services noted that there was improved practice in child protection investigations following the development of robust monitoring strategies by senior managers. Recent data show improvements in ensuring children in care have stability in their placements. Some improvements are also evident in ensuring that children are kept safe within the community. For example, the number of children admitted to hospital because of accidental or deliberate injury has continued to reduce well. Services for children who have run away from home or overnight care have improved well and faster than elsewhere. However, the numbers of children killed or seriously injured on the roads are not decreasing as quickly as in other areas.

Almost all services and settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning, the only exception being secondary schools. At the end of the Reception Year in school, children do as well as children elsewhere despite a slight dip in achievement in 2009. However, the gap between children who do not achieve very well and the rest of their peers is getting wider. This year, the local authority reports good improvements at the end of the Reception Year, including for the lowest achieving children. At the end of primary school, standards are too low. Nevertheless, there was a good improvement in 2009 in the gap in achievement between children from low-income families and their peers. A small number of primary schools are not reaching the expected standards. Although results in secondary schools continue to improve, at the age of 16 too few young people gain five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics and there is too big a gap in the attainment of 16-year-olds from low-income families or who have special educational needs and that of their peers. However, there have been some improvements in secondary schools: more young people are getting two good science GCSEs, fewer young people had poor attendance in 2009 and improvements in behaviour have been sustained.

North Lincolnshire has involved many groups of young people in writing its Children and Young People's Plan and five young people are on the Children's Trust Board. Young people in care and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also have good opportunities to give their views. Most services and settings are good at involving young people in decision-making and activity in their communities, but this is not as strong in childcare settings, secondary schools, pupil referral units and one of the children's homes. Re-offending by young people in North Lincolnshire is worse

than in similar areas, although by most measures, the youth offending service is adequate. The number of young people who are caught committing an offence for the first time has fallen and there has also been a good reduction in the number of young people who re-offend. The number of young offenders who are in education, training or work dropped significantly in 2009, but is still in line with the national average. However, the similarly sharp decline in the access of young offenders to suitable housing means this figure is too low.

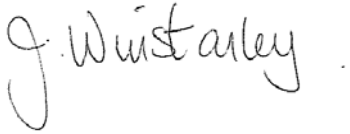
Apart from secondary schools, at least the large majority of other types of services and settings are good at preparing children for future training or work. There have been good improvements over time in the numbers who gain good qualifications by the age of 19. Provisional data for 2010 show that A level results for secondary school sixth forms have improved well. Most recent available data show an increase in the number of 17-year-olds who stay in education or are being trained. After steady improvement from 2007 to 2009, there has been a rise in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training. The local authority is aware that the current economic climate presents further challenges in this area. Encouragingly, recent data show a good improvement in the numbers of care leavers in education, work or training and this makes performance better than that found nationally.

Prospects for improvement

The review of the Children and Young People's Plan notes good progress in important areas and shows clear analysis of what still needs to be done. The local authority has identified the right priorities for improvement. This small local authority is rightly increasing sub-regional working to help bring about further improvement. The most recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found that the strength of professional development and career progression had helped the local authority to retain social work staff and create stability within teams. It also found that good quality joint working with the police ensured prompt and well-co-ordinated responses to safeguard children. Good partnership working is also demonstrated through clear improvements in health outcomes. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. It also shows the local authority is providing effective support for students whose circumstances have made them more vulnerable in an academy in the local area. The local authority has targeted support and challenge for low-attaining primary schools to bring about improvement. Provisional data for 2010 show the number of young people gaining good GCSE results has continued to rise.

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