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Ms Lisa Christensen
Director of Children's Services
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County Hall, Martineau Lane
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Dear Ms Christensen

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.

Norfolk County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Norfolk County Council perform adequately.

A large majority of all types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The number of schools judged to be inadequate has risen sharply. Two primary schools and three secondary schools were judged to be inadequate in the academic year 2008/2009. This increased to 10 primary schools and five secondary schools in the academic year 2009/2010. This total of fifteen schools being judged by inspections to be providing an inadequate standard of education over the last year is the largest in England. The proportion of good primary and secondary schools and school sixth forms remains lower than in similar areas and the rest of England and little of this provision is outstanding. The two sixth form colleges and four further education colleges in Norfolk are all good or better. Childcare and nurseries are mostly good. A high proportion of special schools and children's homes are outstanding and almost all of the others are good, but fewer than average pupil referral units are good. The local fostering agency is good and the local adoption agency is outstanding.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified some strengths and several areas for development. However, no issues seem to be putting children whose circumstances have made them vulnerable at risk of harm. One serious case review has been evaluated in the last year and it was conducted well.

National performance measures show a large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or similar areas; none are above. A majority of educational attainment indicators are in line with similar areas; a minority for young people over the age of 16. The attainment of very young children is static and lower than in similar areas. Test results for 11-year-olds have been improving only slowly, because not enough pupils are making sufficient progress in English and mathematics. Not enough 17-year-olds continue with their education or training and too few 19-year-olds are obtaining qualifications. The proportion of statements of special educational needs that are produced within the required timescales is well below average.

Key areas for further development

- Improve primary and secondary schools and school sixth forms so more are good or better and fewer are inadequate.
- Increase the rate of improvement of the attainment of five-year-olds so they do at least as well as children in similar areas.
- Ensure many more children make the progress they should in English and mathematics by the age of 11.

- Significantly improve the number of young people over the age of 17 who continue with their learning and the number of 19-year-olds who obtain qualifications.

Outcomes for children and young people

Healthy lifestyles are promoted strongly by all settings and services, although not as many pupil referral units are as good as elsewhere. Further progress has been made in the development of effective services for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties. Parents of disabled children indicate their levels of satisfaction with local services are much higher than average. Local knowledge about whether babies from the age of six to eight weeks are still being breast-fed has improved and is now in line with the rest of England; however, the proportion of mothers who continue with breast-feeding is lower than average. Strategies to reduce obesity among five- and 11-year-olds have been successful as the percentage of obese children has reduced in the last year.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are largely good in schools and colleges. However, in some of the pupil referral units and in one of the sixth form colleges, provision is satisfactory in this respect. The Local Safeguarding Children Board's self-assessment of the information it has about children who have run away from home or care, and the policies and procedures in place to deal with them is not as good as in other local areas. An unannounced inspection in May 2010 found children in need of protection are consistently responded to in an assured and timely way. Social workers are well supervised and they value the training opportunities available to them. However, the quality of initial and full assessments is very variable, and sometimes insufficient account is taken of the cultural needs of children and their families during an assessment and the subsequent services provided. Recording is not sufficiently timely and a significant number of assessments needed to be completed. Difficulties with the electronic recording system contribute to delays in recording and the production of inaccurate data reports, which makes it difficult for social care managers to accurately assess how well their teams are doing.

Fewer primary and secondary schools in Norfolk are good than in similar areas and the rest of England and a very low proportion is outstanding. In the last academic year a relatively large number have been judged to be providing an inadequate standard of education. This is affecting the rate at which standards are improving. The local authority knows it needs to improve the achievement of very young children, which in the last two years has been lower than in similar areas. It also knows it needs to improve the test results of 11-year-olds, which have been consistently lower than in similar areas and the national average. Provisional results for 2010 indicate results are worse than in previous years, so the gap with the national average has widened. Examination results for 16-year-olds are consistently lower than in similar areas, although the gap is narrowing because they are improving at a faster rate. However, they fell below the national average for the first time in 2007 and again in 2009. Pupils are not making sufficient progress in

approximately one in four secondary schools. The local authority's virtual school for children and young people in care is being instrumental in helping them to achieve more, particularly at age 16. Attendance in secondary schools is improving, but remains much lower than in similar areas. Information provided by the local authority indicates further significant improvements in the last year. Nevertheless, high numbers of pupils are frequently absent in approximately a quarter of the county's secondary schools. The proportion of secondary schools where behaviour is judged to be good or outstanding continues to be lower than average, but there has been a significant reduction in the number of pupils being excluded from school.

Most schools and other settings are good at involving children and young people in decision making and positive activity in their community. A lower proportion of young women under the age of 18 become pregnant in Norfolk than in the rest of England. Teenage pregnancy rates are highest in Great Yarmouth and Norwich. The most recent data show a fall for the first time in four years by a higher rate than in similar areas and nationally. On most measures, the youth offending service is performing poorly, nevertheless they have good capacity to sustain and improve their performance. Fewer young people are offending for the first time, although rates of re-offending are unchanged. Not enough young offenders take part in education and training.

Colleges, schools and other providers have worked together to significantly increase the range of education and training opportunities available to young people aged 16 to 19. This has helped to reduce the percentage of young people who take no part in education and training at a faster rate than in similar areas. The number of young people continuing with their education when they are at the age of 16 is broadly average. However, too many have discontinued their education or training by the time they are aged 17, and this situation is not improving sufficiently quickly. Relatively few young people leaving care take part in any education or training. Nineteen-year-olds in Norfolk have consistently obtained far fewer qualifications than young people in similar areas. The rate of improvement is slower than in similar areas and the rest of England, so the gap is widening. More children and young people live in families on low incomes than in many other parts of East Anglia. However, fewer of these families than average make use of the funding available to them for childcare.

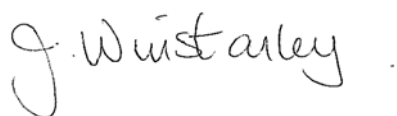
Prospects for improvement

Some outcomes for children and young people in Norfolk are improving, but many have either not improved or are improving only slowly. In its Children and Young People's Plan, the local authority and its partners demonstrate that they know what needs to improve. The local authority has strengths in its services and provision for children whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and young people, such as those in its care or with special educational needs. The local authority has been less successful in improving the quality of its primary and secondary schools and preventing a high number from providing an inadequate standard of education in the last year. Necessary improvements in the attainment of pupils of all ages are happening only slowly. Ofsted monitoring visits to the weakest schools show the

quality of support provided by the local authority has been generally good. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found staff were well supervised by their managers and valued the training opportunities provided. This had a positive effect on staff morale. However, inaccurate data within performance reporting leads to managers having insufficient detail about how well their teams are functioning. Not all team managers are effective in using management and performance information to drive improvements.

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