

9 December 2010

Mrs Rose Collinson  
Director of Children's Services  
Medway Council  
Gun Wharf, Dock Road  
Chatham  
Kent ME4 4TR

Dear Mrs Collinson

## 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.

## Medway Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
--------------------------------	-------------------

Children's services in Medway Council perform well and have improved since the 2009 assessment when they were adequate.

Overall, the large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The quality of day care for young children has improved but overall effectiveness remains below that of similar areas with only a half of childminder settings good or better. Nurseries and early years provision in primary schools is much stronger, with the very large majority good or better. Only half of primary schools are good or better, with five being inadequate and there has been no improvement since the last assessment. The overall effectiveness of secondary schools has improved however and the large majority are good or better, although two are inadequate. After the age of 16, provision is mostly good with school sixth forms and a good general further education college. Services and schools for groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are consistently good or better. All special schools and pupil referral units are good as are children's homes and fostering and adoption agencies.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a number of strengths and areas for improvement but no aspects which required priority action. Private fostering arrangements are good.

National measures of performance show the large majority of outcomes to be in line with or above comparator areas. Children make insufficient progress in both English and mathematics in primary schools however and the results achieved by 11-year-olds in national tests are well below average. Young people make better progress in secondary schools and test results for 16-year-olds are the same as for similar areas and improving. Numbers of young people who achieve GCSE or equivalent qualifications by the age of 19 are much lower than average despite mostly good provision for 14- to 19-year-olds. Children and young people with special educational needs achieve results similar to elsewhere, but assessment of children's special educational needs can take too long although this is improving.

### Key areas for further improvement

- Improve the quality of childcare so that more settings are good or better.
- Improve primary schools so that more are good or better and improve test results for 11-year-olds.
- Ensure more young people achieve GCSE or equivalent qualifications by the age of 19.

## Outcomes for children and young people

Ofsted inspections have found services, institutions and settings, with the exception of childminders, to be mostly good or better in helping children and young people live healthy lifestyles. Health outcomes, however, are mixed and are not improving quickly enough. Children are increasingly taking part in sport regularly and the gap with children nationally is closing. More young children than in similar areas are too overweight and although the rate for 11-year-olds in Medway reduced in 2009, it continued to rise for 5-year-olds. Pregnancy rates for young women aged 18 or younger are in line with similar parts of the country but highly variable across the authority and although they are reducing overall, they are not reducing quickly enough. Progress has been made in developing services for emotional and mental health and partners are working to expand these further and to reduce waiting times.

Inspections have found arrangements to keep children and young people safe to be mostly good, although daycare settings need to do more. The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found suitable procedures for responding to concerns about children and young people's safety. The effectiveness of actions to keep children safe in their communities, however, is mixed. The number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road accidents is reducing, but numbers admitted to hospital because of intentional or unintentional injuries are high and increasing. Significantly more children than in other areas report having been bullied. A coordinator has been appointed to support schools to improve this and local surveys indicate that work is beginning to have an impact.

The very large majority of inspected services, settings and institutions are judged good or better at helping children and young people enjoy their learning. Children make reasonable progress during their reception year at school and outcomes are a little better than in similar areas and improving faster. The local authority has also been successful in helping children who are not doing very well in their learning to catch up with others of the same age. However, children make insufficient progress in English and mathematics in primary school and standards in national tests at the age of 11 are well below average. Although the local authority had been successful in reducing the number of schools failing to reach the minimum standard for pupil performance, there was an increase last year. Secondary schools are improving: pupils make better progress and by the age of 16, standards are at the average for similar parts of the country and improving. Standards achieved by 11-year-olds from families with low incomes are lower than average, but improved significantly last year for 16-year-olds and are now comparable to similar areas. There is no clear trend of attainment gaps closing however. Good progress has been made in improving behaviour in secondary schools and reducing the level of poor attendance.

Children and young people are helped well to contribute to their local communities. Good and increasing numbers take part in organised activities in the local borough and permanent exclusions from school are declining and are lower than in similar areas. Numbers of young people who have been drunk or taken drugs recently are

broadly average. Fewer young people are committing crime for the first time and the local authority is achieving its targets for reducing re-offending. Young people who offend are increasingly helped to find suitable places to live, although the numbers are not as high as in similar areas. The authority is successful in ensuring they work or continue in education or training.

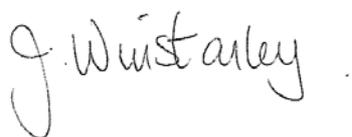
Inspections have found schools and colleges are consistently good at preparing children and young people for working life. Numbers of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not working or continuing in education or training are lower than average and reducing. More young people than average continue in education or training, and increasing numbers gain qualifications by the age of 19, although fewer than average are GCSE or equivalent. Although those from families with low incomes do as well as in similar areas, they are not catching up with their peers in the borough. Almost all care leavers have suitable places to live in, but less than half work or continue in education or training.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Outcomes for children and young people are improving, although not in all aspects. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan is detailed and provides a clear overview of progress and further actions to be taken. Health inequalities in many parts of the borough present significant challenges. Joint actions between health and education are beginning to have some impact, but much remains to be done. The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found managers and staff to have responded positively to the findings of inspections and audits, resulting in significant improvement in services. Staff are committed, enthusiastic and morale is high. Recent inspections of childcare settings indicate increasing numbers to be good or better. To raise standards at age 11, a programme of school reorganisation is being implemented and the council is aiming to reduce the numbers of children changing school between infants and juniors. Ofsted monitoring visits to weaker schools show the local authority providing good support for improvement. Unvalidated results for 2009/10 indicate that standards for 11-year-olds are improving. Educational outcomes continue to improve for 16-year-olds and actions to improve outcomes for 19-year-olds are beginning to have an impact. A new further education campus will extend learning opportunities.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment