

9 December 2010

Mr Peter Duxbury
Director of Children's Services
Lincolnshire County Council
County Offices, Newland
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Dear Mr Duxbury

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.

Lincolnshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Lincolnshire County Council perform excellently.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, post-16 provision and most secondary schools are good, with a quarter outstanding. Inspection shows the number of good primary schools continues to grow. Much nursery and childcare provision is good, as is the provision for children and young people attending special schools and pupil referral units. However, in the last year inspection by Ofsted has shown that two secondary schools require significant improvement. Residential provision for children with special educational needs is good, as are seven of the eight local authority children's homes, although inspection highlighted weaknesses in the eighth. The local fostering and adoption agencies are good. The private fostering arrangements are adequate.

A recent inspection by Ofsted of safeguarding arrangements reported that services were outstanding. Agencies work together very effectively to reduce risks for children across Lincolnshire. The inspection identified good services for looked after children. An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show outcomes are almost always in line with, or above, the averages for England or similar areas. Results in national tests are average for 11-year-olds but 16-year-olds do better than their peers elsewhere. However, 19-year-olds from low-income families do not achieve as many qualifications as those from similar backgrounds elsewhere and the gap between them and their peers in Lincolnshire is getting wider. More 16-year-olds with special educational needs do well in national examinations than their peers in similar areas. In recent years, almost all 16- to 18-year-olds have been involved in education, employment or training.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the achievement of young people from low-income families at the age of 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. All children's homes, nursery and primary schools and sixth forms are good at this, so too are almost all secondary schools. Clear actions are identified in the Children and Young People's Plan to further improve local health provision, promote healthy lifestyles and tackle health inequalities. Ambitious targets have been set for vaccinations and increasing the number of new mothers breast-

feeding their babies. Currently breast-feeding rates are below similar areas and national figures. Action to reduce obesity has been effective with levels of obesity at the age of 11 lower than the national average. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling more quickly than found nationally. A recent survey reported that fewer 16-year-olds than in previous years said that they had recently been drunk or taken drugs. This is better than in similar areas and found nationally where it is increasing.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are outstanding. This is reflected in Ofsted inspections of front-line child protection services, in safeguarding arrangements, and good services for looked after children. Local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm and use a common approach for assessing and meeting their needs. Schools and colleges are almost always good at promoting children and young people's safety. So too are almost all children's homes, although this was identified as an important area of weakness in one during the last year. There are some major strengths in the arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community, with number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads reducing more quickly than elsewhere, although more young people say they feel bullied than their peers in similar areas. This is being addressed through Lincolnshire's anti-bullying strategy.

All special schools and colleges are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. So too are the large majority of secondary schools, although fewer primary schools are judged to be good in this area than found elsewhere. The local authority is successful in its work to help all schools get better, promoting successful federations where the best schools support improved provision and performance of pupils in less effective schools. The number of secondary schools not reaching the minimum targets is reducing quickly and achievement in national examinations including English, mathematics and science subjects is very good. Behaviour in secondary schools is almost always good with persistent absence rates reducing. Targeted support is provided to those children and young people whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable, for example support to children in care is having a positive impact on their achievement at the age of 11. Young people from low-income groups do not do as well as others at the age of 16.

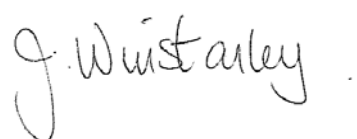
Young people are increasingly involved in shaping services to better meet their needs and interests, such as the development of the successful website designed with young people to improve communication about local activities. Recent developments, such as the children in care council, extend participation to those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision making and activity in their communities. More young people report that they are taking up opportunities from an increasing range of sport and leisure activities in their local community. Targeted action by local services and voluntary groups working successfully together is reducing anti-social behaviour. The number of young people offending for the first time is falling steadily. Re-offending rates have declined significantly but remain similar to elsewhere.

The local authority knows that not all young people do as well as they should at the age of 19, particularly those from low-income families. A range of activities to raise aspirations of young people and encourage them to further success has been introduced. Most young people receive good support to gain the skills and qualifications needed for future jobs. More young people, including teenage mothers, are involved in education, employment or training than in similar areas. Even so, the local authority has set itself challenging targets to increase this number further. Almost all schools and settings effectively promote the skills needed for future economic well-being although primary schools are less often judged to be good in this area. A large majority of care leavers are involved in education, training or employment.

Prospects for improvement

Almost all outcomes for children and young people are higher than average or improving in Lincolnshire. Highly effective leadership across a range of services, including those for school improvement and for groups whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable, is confirmed by inspection. Areas of relative under-performance are identified and appropriate action taken. For example, The Lincolnshire Primary Challenge has been introduced in 20 primary schools to improve performance. Where Ofsted has monitored inadequate provision, satisfactory progress to bring about the required improvement is reported. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good understanding of current outcomes and identifies the appropriate action to be taken to further improve local provision. Although the plan does not provide an evaluation of how successful its actions have been on improving outcomes for all groups, future targets are usually challenging.

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