

9 December 2010

Ms Rachel Dickinson
Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Leicester City Council
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Leicester
Leicestershire, LE1 6ZG

Dear Ms Dickinson

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.

Leicester City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Leicester City Council perform adequately.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, almost all the special schools are at least good, as are all of the children's homes. Two of the five homes are outstanding, as is the local authority fostering agency. During the last year there has been an increase in the number of good childcare providers and primary, special and secondary schools. However, inspection shows that about half of primary schools are still only satisfactory and six are failing to provide a satisfactory quality of education. The quality of most post-16 provision, including that for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, has also improved although one sixth form college, good in 2009, has been judged satisfactory in its most recent inspection. The adoption agency, although judged adequate overall, provides an outstanding range of support to adoptive families.

A joint area review in June 2008 identified good safeguarding arrangements and good provision for children looked after by the local authority. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action. The provision effectively focuses on the protection of children and ensuring the diverse needs of families are considered.

National performance measures show almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Although results in national tests and examinations are below average for both 11- and 16-year olds, achievement is improving at a faster rate than elsewhere. A few young people with special educational needs do less well at the age of 16 than others of the same age nationally. Those from low-income families do not do as well as their peers, but the gap is closing for all age groups at a faster rate than in similar areas. Nineteen-year-olds gain as many qualifications as those from similar backgrounds across the country, but the latest results show no improvement on the previous year. In recent years, there has been a reduction in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training but rates remain higher than elsewhere.

Key areas for further development

- Improve primary schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve attainment at the age of 11 and 16.
- Improve attainment at the age of 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

Nearly all schools and pupil referral units are good at encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives, although childminders and local sixth form

colleges do not do as well. The local authority and partners are aware of the impact health inequalities have on children in Leicester City and have developed plans to improve the health and happiness of all. Recent improvements include the reducing numbers of children who are obese at the age of five and 11 and, although still below average, more children taking part in physical education and sport. More mothers are still breast-feeding their babies at six to eight weeks than in similar areas. In a recent survey more young people than found elsewhere said their relationships with family and friends were good. Services for children and young people with emotional or mental health difficulties are well developed. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is higher than average, but falling at a faster rate than nationally. Far fewer 16-year-olds report that they have recently been drunk or taken drugs than in similar areas.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good; inspections by Ofsted of schools and colleges confirm this. However, not enough childminders are good in this area. Good local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm, although not everyone is clear about when to use the common assessment approach to identify appropriate support. There has been an increase in the number of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time suggesting that support maybe being removed too quickly. Provision for children in the care of the local authority is good. There is varied success in the arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community. The number of young people who say they feel bullied is similar to elsewhere. Over time there has been a good reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads. However, hospital admissions due to unintentional or deliberate injuries are higher than elsewhere.

The local authority is focused in its work to help all schools get better. Local colleges and school sixth forms are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. However, not as many primary schools are good in this area as found nationally. Although improving faster than elsewhere the achievement of very young children continues to be low. Most primary schools are helping children to make the expected progress and they reach standards at the age of 11 that are in line with similar local authorities. Standards at 16 years of age are rising quickly. Although still below similar areas, 2010 GCSE results reflect continued good progress in the proportion of young people gaining five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics. As standards improve overall, the gap in achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families and those with special educational needs gets wider and they are not doing as well as their peers elsewhere. Behaviour is not always as good as it could be in secondary schools. However, the number of secondary pupils who are often absent from school is lower than the national average and very few young people are permanently excluded from school.

Very successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for a long time. The involvement of children and young people in consultation and decision-making is outstanding. Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision-making and activity in their communities. Rates of first-time offending are falling and

are well below similar areas. Action taken to reduce re-offending is having a positive impact, although the numbers of young offenders sentenced to custody are higher than the England average.

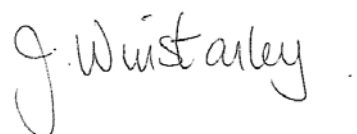
The local authority has high aspirations for improving economic well-being and is investing in skills and enterprise to achieve its aims. Partnership plans clearly prioritise the raising of achievement and aspirations. Effective partnerships have resulted in an increased range of work-related learning options and personalised programmes for many young people. Achievement has improved and each year more young people are gaining higher level qualifications. More young people from low-income families are gaining good qualifications and the gap in their achievement with their peers is closing. A recent Ofsted survey highlighted strengths in the local arrangements for tackling the number of young people not in education, work or training. More are getting involved and most recent figures are in line with similar areas. Numbers fluctuate each year, but the majority of care leavers are in education, work or training.

Prospects for improvement

Almost all outcomes are improving with the large majority in line or above similar areas although not always as good as national figures. The local area agreement illustrates the commitment to improve outcomes for children within the context of improving confidence, prosperity, health and happiness of all. Agreed targets illustrate the commitment to drive up standards and redress inequalities. On going improvements in Leicester City's children's services have been recognised by the withdrawal of the notice to improve in March 2010. The high level of commitment of senior officers and successful well-established partnerships to bring about much needed further improvement is highlighted in Ofsted inspection and survey reports. Tackling the right priorities and good partnership working is demonstrated through improved health outcomes, reducing offending rates, good strategies to involve young people in education, training or work, and improving educational outcomes over time. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found that although there was a shortage of social workers, managers provided effective support and direction.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment