

9 December 2010

Ms Eleanor Schooling
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Islington
222 Upper Street
London N1 1YA

Dear Ms Schooling

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.

London Borough of Islington children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Islington perform well.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. School provision is strong in the borough with a higher proportion of primary and secondary schools that are good or better than found elsewhere. Most primary and secondary schools are good or outstanding. Childcare is not as strong, with just over half of the provision being good or better. This is a lower proportion of good provision than found elsewhere, but recent inspections do show some improvement. Of the four school sixth forms, two are good or better and the others are satisfactory. The local general further education college is outstanding.

Provision for children and young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable is of good quality overall. All of the special schools, special school sixth forms and the children's home are at least good. Three of the four pupil referral units are good or outstanding. The local authority's adoption and fostering agencies are both good, as are private fostering arrangements.

The very recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services published in December 2010 found areas of strength alongside many satisfactory features, with some areas for development. There are no weaknesses requiring urgent action.

Outcomes for children and young people are in line with or above the appropriate comparator for most national performance measures. However, the teenage pregnancy rate is higher than both the London and England average. Less than half of the key performance measures for educational attainment are in line with or above similar area averages. Educational outcomes are below the average for similar areas at the age of five, 16 and 19. Strategies to narrow achievement gaps for groups whose circumstance have made them vulnerable, such as those from low-income families and those with special educational needs, are having some success. Results for 11-year-olds from low-income backgrounds are improving at a faster rate than the average for similar areas, albeit from a low base, and the improved attainment means the gap has narrowed significantly.

Key areas for further development

- Further improve the quality of childcare in the borough so that more of the youngest children attend high quality provision.
- Increase the number of five-year-olds who achieve a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year at school.

- Improve attainment for 16-year-olds and young people by the age of 19 so that more gain the qualifications they need.

Outcomes for children and young people

The large majority of settings and services have good arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives. Islington has a comprehensive and successful action plan to support and improve breast-feeding rates. The numbers of babies breast-feeding after six weeks is above the national average. The local authority is aware of the need to tackle the high levels of childhood obesity. Levels have improved for 11-year-olds, but increased for five-year-olds, although performance is broadly in line with similar areas for both age groups. The local authority has taken a decision to provide free school meals to all nursery and primary school pupils and more children are now taking part in sport regularly. Islington has a comparatively high rate of teenage pregnancy. Although there has been a reduction over the last decade, the rate increased more recently and the rate of reduction is now below the England and London average.

Good arrangements to help children and young people stay safe can be found in the large majority of services and settings. However, childminding provision is less effective in this respect. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found a balance of strengths and areas for development. Strengths include highly effective collaborative working and co-location with local voluntary organisations for children and young people with additional needs, and the excellent multi-agency approach to identifying specific groups of vulnerable children. Children on the edge of care receive responsive and intensive home-based support. Areas for further improvement include the inappropriate overnight detainment of children and young people in police cells without assessment.

Despite the overall good quality of schools in Islington, improving educational outcomes for children and young people is a key area for further development. A much lower proportion of children achieve a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year at school than in similar areas. However, recent unvalidated data suggest a significant improvement in 2010. By the age of 11 children's results in national tests are broadly average and although three primary schools did not meet the expected standard in these tests, this is an improvement from eight the previous year. Provisional results for 2010 do not show further improvement. The numbers of young people achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is significantly below the average for similar areas. However, results are better than in previous years and overall improvement is taking place at a faster than average pace, albeit from a very low base. No secondary school did not meet the expected standard. Local data show there has been a reduction in the number of permanent exclusions from schools and attendance is improving but remains a focus for the local authority.

Opportunities for children and young people to be involved in planning and reviewing local services continue to develop across settings and services. The number of young people taking part in organised activities outside of school are increasing and in line with elsewhere. Young people have created a series of podcasts featuring the stories of young people who have used local youth services. There has been a significant reduction in the number of young people who have been caught breaking the law for the first time. The youth offending service demonstrates good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance. However, there has been an increase in the number of young people re-offending and the rate is now higher than in similar areas.

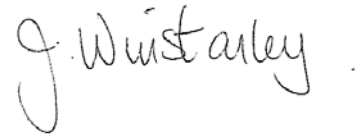
Following on from low GCSE results at the age of 16, by the age of 19 the proportion of young people getting the GCSE and A level or equivalent qualifications they need to enhance their life chances is significantly below average. However, there is a positive trend overall and results are improving at the same pace as the average in similar areas, but again from a low base. The local authority knows that they need to secure better outcomes for young people and are working with a wide range of partners, including the outstanding local college to do this. Effective strategies to reduce the number of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in work, education and training have led to a further improvement and performance is broadly in line with similar areas.

Prospects for improvement

The Islington Children and Young People's Plan 2006–2011 contains key priorities that continue to be relevant and challenging. Those planning provision and services have a good understanding of the diverse needs of children, young people and families in the borough. The local authority's self-assessment demonstrates thorough monitoring and evaluation of progress. It details strengths and areas where outcomes do not yet match ambitions. A clear focus on performance across all outcome areas is being maintained and the local authority has identified where more action is required to bring about improvement; for example, the lower than average quality of childcare provision across the borough led to a review of childminding in 2009. Action has been taken by the local authority to improve this, and there has been an improvement in the number of recent inspections of childminders receiving a good or better judgement, although overall provision is not as good as found elsewhere. Some challenging areas for improvement, such as raising educational attainment, continue to be a key priority for the local authority and its partners. Actions have been agreed with head teachers which will support secondary schools in raising the attainment of children and young people.

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