

9 December 2010

Mr David Sanders
Interim Director of Children's Services
Herefordshire Council
Brockington, 35 Hafod Road
Hereford
Herefordshire HR1 1SH

Dear Mr Sanders

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.

Herefordshire Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
---------------------------------------	--------------------------------

Children's services in Herefordshire Council perform adequately. This is because arrangements for safeguarding children, although adequate, require further improvement.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified significant weaknesses in the referral and assessment service resulting in an area for priority action. A subsequent full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in September 2010 reported that prompt remedial action had been taken and the work of the referral and assessment team is now adequate. However, many of the actions taken are still very new and improvement is not yet embedded. Private fostering arrangements were judged inadequate in January 2009. However, although notifications remain low, recent inspection has found some progress has been made since then.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of early years settings are good, though nearly one in four childminder settings are only adequate. Around two thirds of primary and secondary schools are good or better, but a third are just adequate. Four primary schools were judged inadequate in 2010/11, but are making satisfactory progress. There are no inadequate secondary schools, special schools or pupil referral units. Provision in educational settings for those whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable is good. Three of the four special schools are good or better. Two of the three pupil referral units are outstanding and the other is good. Provision for 16- to 18-year-olds is good overall in colleges and school sixth forms, with all but one setting judged good or better in their most recent inspection. Services for children in care are also good and the support they receive in their education is outstanding. The local authority adoption service is adequate and the fostering service good.

National performance measures show the very large majority of all outcomes, and the large majority of educational outcomes, are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Children's achievement by the end of the Reception class in primary schools is below that found in similar areas and in the bottom 25% of local authorities nationally. Results in national tests are generally in line with those in similar parts of the country at the age of 11, though one in ten primary schools do not meet minimum educational standards. At the age of 16, standards remain in line with the average for similar local authorities. Results by the age of 19 are improving, with the percentage gaining two or more A-level qualifications or their equivalent rising faster than in similar areas. A higher percentage of 11-year-olds are seriously overweight than in similar parts of the country.

Key areas for further development

- Take action to implement the recommendations from the recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services.
- Improve the number of good and better primary schools.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of inspected settings and services give good support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. National data indicate that breast-feeding rates are in line with those nationally and in similar areas. The take-up of school lunches is higher than in similar parts of the country in both primary and secondary schools. Obesity levels for children at the age of 11 have risen and are now above those in similar areas. This is a priority area for the local authority and its partners, who have put in place a comprehensive strategy to educate children and young people about the importance of a healthy diet and lifestyle. The percentage of children and young people who participate in high quality physical exercise and sport has increased and is higher than nationally. A recent internal evaluation of the child and adolescent mental health services shows that although the number of referrals has more than doubled, waiting times for treatment have reduced.

The large majority of inspected settings and services make a good contribution to keeping children safe. Following earlier concerns, the recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services found that the work of the referral and assessment team is now adequate and that cases are now being appropriately prioritised. Good action taken by the local authority has ensured that new referrals are now responded to in a timely and appropriate way and decisions about contacts and referrals are now consistent. However, many of the actions taken by the local authority are very new and the referral and assessment service continues to be closely monitored by the senior leadership team. Through inspection, a number of significant areas requiring improvement were identified, including the promptness of assessments, the quality of supervision of social workers, the rigour of performance monitoring and the involvement of partner agencies. Services for children in care, including the fostering service are good; the adoption service, while improving is adequate. There are no local authority residential children's homes in Herefordshire, and the council places children in ten homes, of which four are private and voluntary homes within the county, all of which were judged at least good at their most recent inspection. The number of children and young people seriously injured or killed on the roads in the county is similar to the national picture as are hospital admissions for unintentional or deliberate injuries.

The large majority of inspected settings and services are good at helping children enjoy and achieve. The proportion of early years settings judged good or better in inspection is higher than in similar areas and nationally. However, at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's achievement is significantly lower than that in similar areas. By the end of their primary education, children's achievement has

improved to be in line with that nationally and in similar parts of the country. By the end of secondary education achievement is in line with similar areas. Children in care receive excellent support and achieve very well in comparison to similar local authorities; the gap between their achievement and the rest of children in Herefordshire is narrowing. Approximately two thirds of primary and secondary schools are good or better and 40% of secondary schools are outstanding. There are fewer outstanding primary schools and the number that are inadequate has risen slightly in the last year. The number of secondary school students with poor attendance is continuing to fall and is in line with the average for similar parts of the country.

The very large majority of settings and services support children and young people well in making a contribution to services through consultation and participation, for example through the Children's Shadow Board, the Youth Council and the Children in Care Council. A significantly higher percentage of young people take part in volunteering and organised activities in their local area than elsewhere. The rate of reduction in the under-18 conception rate is broadly in line with the national average. The council acknowledges concerns over the number of repeat pregnancies and the rise in the number of terminations. Rates of permanent exclusions from schools have fallen and remain broadly in line with similar authorities and nationally. Re-offending by young people in Herefordshire is comparable with similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well.

The large majority of inspected services and settings are successful in helping young people prepare for adult life. The quality of educational provision in school sixth forms and further education settings is mostly good or outstanding. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 in education, training or work has remained around the average for similar areas. Young people who are in the care of the local authority are very well supported; the proportion who continue into education, training or work is high and in the top 25% of local authorities nationally. The proportion of young people gaining the equivalent of five good GCSEs or two A levels by the age of 19 continues to rise and is slightly above the average for similar local authorities. The proportion of young people from low-income backgrounds who progress to higher education is in line with the national picture and that in similar areas. The take-up of formal childcare by low-income families is also in line with the national average.

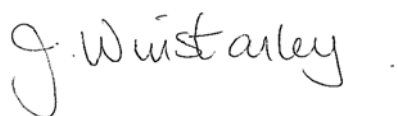
Prospects for improvement

Outcomes for children and young people are improving overall in Herefordshire. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates continuing progress in a number of areas, including raising educational attainment. There are many examples of good or outstanding services and settings, though a third of schools remain only satisfactory. Monitoring reports on two of the four primary schools judged that one had made good progress and the other satisfactory progress, and were supported well overall by the school improvement services. A recent inspection found that the local authority has shown ambition and strong commitment to the development of high quality services for looked after children

leading to good outcomes. However, the local authority has not provided the same level of good leadership to assuring the quality of its safeguarding services. After the unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in July 2010, the authority took prompt action to tackle weaknesses and strengthen management oversight and capacity. The capacity to improve safeguarding services is now judged as adequate, but significant further work needs to be done to embed the many new processes which are still at an early stage of development.

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