

9 December 2010

Ms Catherine Doran
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Harrow
Civic Centre, Station Road
Harrow
London HA1 2XF

Dear Ms Doran

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:

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| 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 the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

London Borough of Harrow children's services assessment 2010

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs well (3) |
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Children's services in Harrow continue to perform well.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding. The large majority do well at supporting learning and achievement and in keeping children and young people safe. For the youngest children, early years and childcare are mostly good but too many childminders are only satisfactory. Most nursery and primary schools are good or outstanding as are all secondary schools. For provision after the age of 16, school sixth forms are good and the sixth form college is outstanding but further education is only satisfactory. Three of four special schools are outstanding and the third is good, as is the pupil referral unit. For children in care, one children's home run by the local authority is outstanding and the other has recently improved from satisfactory to good. Of the children's homes that are independently run, one is good and the other is satisfactory. The local authority's fostering and adoption agencies are satisfactory.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found many strengths and no areas for priority action. Private fostering arrangements are good.

National measures of performance show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above those for similar areas or nationally, including all measures for educational attainment. Standards are rising, including for children and young people from low-income families and for those with special educational needs. The achievement of five-year-olds is average. Pupils in primary schools make the progress expected and results in national tests for 11-year-olds are slightly higher than in similar areas. Sixteen-year-olds do better than in similar areas and by the age of 19, young people are much better qualified than others elsewhere. Gaps in attainment for key vulnerable groups are mostly bigger than in similar areas and nationally. While the gap for five-year-olds is closing slowly, others show no consistency in doing so and the gap for 11-year-olds from low-income families has consistently widened. Fewer families with low income now use the funding for childcare that they are entitled to.

Key areas for further development

- Improve childminders so that more are good or better and fostering and adoption services to at least good.
- Close gaps in educational attainment, in particular for 11-year-olds from low-income families.
- Increase numbers of low-income families taking up funding for childcare.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements are successful in encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives and almost all services and settings contribute very well. A full range of services for those with emotional or mental health difficulties are now in place. Fewer children report difficulties in relationships with their friends and family and children in care have no particular concerns. Many more mothers now breast-feed and parents of disabled children are satisfied with services. Many more children and young people are satisfied with parks and playgrounds but only a few more now take part in sport regularly and obesity for five and 11-year-olds has increased slightly. Few young women under 18 become pregnant and numbers are reducing more quickly than elsewhere.

In services and settings, arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are generally at least good but childminders are slightly weaker in this respect. Within the community, fewer children are killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. Although more are admitted to hospital because they are injured accidentally or deliberately, numbers remain below average. Fewer children and young people are bullied and not as many run away from home or care than nationally. In front-line child protection services, average numbers of initial and full assessments are carried out on time. The unannounced inspection found many strengths but some full assessments varied too much in their analysis and partner agencies were not always using a common approach for assessing and meeting the needs of children. These weaknesses have already been tackled. Fewer children with plans in place to protect them from harm need another plan after the first has ended because action has usually been successful. All plans continue to be reviewed on time. The in-house fostering service has been strengthened considerably and a successful partnership with a voluntary agency shows particular success in placing children for adoption and in support for adopters. Children in care have an average number of placement moves that are of average and increasing length. Almost all meetings to review their plans are held on time. Strong monitoring of providers and good action makes sure that children and young people, including those who are disabled, always have residential placements of good quality.

Most services and settings contribute to the educational achievement of children and young people very successfully. Almost all assessments of special educational needs are completed on time. The achievement of five-year-olds has improved more quickly than in similar areas but those who do not do as well in their learning are not catching up as fast as children elsewhere. Pupils make average progress in primary schools. Test results have improved marginally although three, instead of two schools, did not meet minimum standards for pupil performance and the gap for pupils from low-income backgrounds has got wider. All secondary schools still meet the minimum standards expected and all continue to have good or outstanding standards of behaviour, but the number of pupils with poor attendance show a slight increase. Examination results for 16-year-olds have improved and gaps for pupils from low-income families and for those with special educational needs closed in 2009.

Services and settings are mostly very successful at supporting children and young people to make a positive contribution to their communities. Almost all outcomes are in line with comparators. Fewer young people break the law for the first time, fewer re-offend and fewer are now sentenced to custody. More young people who offend are in education, training or work and almost all are in suitable accommodation. However, permanent exclusions from school have reduced but remain too high and fewer, although average numbers of young people now take part in organised activities outside of school.

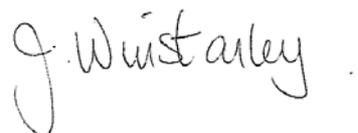
All services and settings run by the local authority are good or better at helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being. After the age of 16, high numbers remain in learning or find work and more are better qualified at the age of 19 than in similar local authorities. More care leavers are in education, work or training and almost all have a suitable place to live. Despite substantial work with low-income families, fewer now make use of the funding for formal childcare because of informal and family arrangements.

Prospects for improvement

Many outcomes for children and young people are improving, including for those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, and services provide value-for-money. The local authority's very thorough review of its Children and Young People's Plan shows careful tracking of progress, good actions to deal with weaknesses such as in further reducing exclusions, good progress in important areas, strong leadership, successful partnerships and good attention to key vulnerable groups. It is also very clear about what still needs to be done and services are being overhauled so that they are in a better position to improve outcomes further. Narrowing the attainment gap and support for childminders are key priorities and work is well underway. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found good action to protect children from harm and good partnerships, particularly with the voluntary sector. The youth offending service works well. It performs excellently against national measures and has good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance further.

The 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" and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment