

9 December 2010

Mr John Coughlan CBE
Director of Children's Services
Hampshire County Council
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Dear Mr Coughlan

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.

Hampshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Hampshire County Council perform excellently. The very large majority of all settings and services inspected by Ofsted are good or better and key areas of provision have been strengthened. In 2010, there is enough good provision to meet the requirements for the grade.

Nursery schools, special schools, further education and sixth form colleges, children's homes as well as fostering and adoption services are major strengths, with a very large majority of provision judged to be good or better. In some key areas, such as early years and childcare and general further education colleges, the number of providers that are good or better has increased over the last year. The large majority of primary and secondary schools are good or better. Against this very strong picture, however, relative weaknesses remain in pupil referral units and in school sixth forms, where over a third of provision is no better than satisfactory. Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe and achieve well in their education are good or better in the very large majority of services.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a broad balance of strengths, satisfactory features and areas for improvement. The local authority's work to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements is good.

National performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are in line with the average or better. Test and examination results for children and young people at age five, 11, 16 and 19 are in line with performance in similar areas and improving at about the same rate. The local authority is closing the gap in attainment between the majority of children and young people and those with special educational needs, as well as those from low-income families. Attainment for both these groups has shown consistent improvement in recent years. However, the improving results achieved by 19-year-olds from low-income families were not sustained in 2009 and the gap between them and the majority at this age is slow to close. The number of care leavers who are not in education, work or training and have no suitable place to live has risen to well above the national average.

Key areas for further development

- Improve pupil referral units and school sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Improve outcomes at the age of 19 for young people from low-income families and for those leaving care.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services and settings give good support to children and young people in living healthy lives. Recent improvements include a fall in the number of 11-year-olds who are seriously overweight and further strengthening of the services that support children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties. The overall number of young women under the age of 18 who get pregnant is below average. However, numbers have fallen more slowly than nationally over the 10 years to 2008 and, in a few places such as Gosport, they are rising. The number of mothers who breast-feed their babies is below the average for similar areas. Children and young people's participation in sport and their satisfaction with local parks and play areas reflect the figures seen nationally.

Arrangements for helping children and young people stay safe are good in the very large majority of settings and services. This includes the effective contributions made by individual childcare providers, schools and colleges. All children's homes in the area are good or better. Fostering and adoption services are good, as is the local authority's work to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements. Senior managers took decisive action as a result of the unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in 2009 and, following a rigorous review of performance and provision, have strengthened these services. Partners have a good understanding of when and how to refer children who may need protecting, and work well together to ensure children get the right help at the right time. Areas for development include the high caseloads of some social workers which mean that timely assessment and service provision are not provided for all children and young people. Progress has been made in improving the quality of core assessments, but there is more to do. Improving the stability of care placements for children in care is a key local priority. The most recent data show an improvement in the number of children who experience frequent placement moves, but a fall in the number in stable longer term placements.

Provision to help children and young people achieve well and to enjoy their learning is mostly good. Inspectors judge the work of social care settings and services as particularly effective in this respect and the county's special schools and residential schools are a major strength. Overall, the quality of early years provision and primary and secondary schools is good and improving, but the quality of the pupil referral units is not nearly as good as that found nationally. Children's performance in national tests and examinations is in line with the average for similar areas at each stage of their education with year-on-year improvement in line with the trend elsewhere. However, in 2009, 32 of the 428 primary schools did not reach the national minimum standard expected for children's attainment and this was the highest number since a peak in 2006. Results for children and young people with special educational needs, as well as those from low-income families, have shown consistent improvement in recent years. The gap between those with special educational needs and the majority at the age of 11 is closing, as is the gap between those from low-income families and the majority at the age of 16. Behaviour in schools is good overall and the number of young people with poor attendance is in line with the average for similar areas and falling.

Arrangements to support children and young people to get involved in decision-making and contribute to their local communities are well-established and a significant strength. The local authority's longstanding commitment to upholding and promoting the rights and responsibilities of children and young people is reflected in the positive inspection findings in schools, colleges and social care settings. Youth forums are active across the county and give young people an important say in local affairs. By most measures, the youth offending service works reasonably well. Re-offending by young people is above average but falling rapidly. However, young people who offend are less likely to be in suitable housing or education, training or work placements than is the case for their peers elsewhere.

Children and young people overall get good support from the very large majority of settings and services to do well in adult life. This is a key strength of many secondary schools, colleges, sixth form schools and children's homes. The number of young people staying on in education or training who go on to gain qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs, or two A levels, is in line with the average for similar areas and improving at about the same rate. However, the year-on-year improvements achieved by 19-year-olds from low-income families were not sustained in 2009 and the gap between them and the majority at this age is slow to close. The most recent data show that outcomes for care leavers have also deteriorated, with the number in education, training or work, and those with a suitable place to live, now well below the national average.

Prospects for improvement

Children's services performed well in 2009 and are now excellent. The local authority has an unrelenting focus on improving outcomes for children and young people and the quality of services provided for them. The impact of its work can be seen, for example, in the year-on-year rise in test and examination results and improvements made to specialist services for children and families. Longstanding good performance in education and social care services has been maintained and built upon.

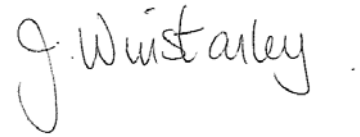
Partnership work is well embedded. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan shows progress in important areas and identifies what still needs to be done, for example to improve outcomes for children and young people leaving care. Partners share a clear vision and high ambitions for tackling inequalities in health, education and opportunity. Planning is firmly rooted in a secure understanding of local need.

The commitment to involve children and young people and their families in planning, developing and evaluating provision is demonstrated in the highly effective work of individual services and continues to be a strong feature of Hampshire as a whole.

The local authority has a good track record of supporting schools to improve, but challenges remain in reducing further the number that are only satisfactory.

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