

9 December 2010

Mr Duncan Jordan
Group Director - Children and Young People
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall, Westgate Street
Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL1 2TP

Dear Mr Jordan

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 in, 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.

Gloucestershire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Gloucestershire County Council perform well.

The large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better. This reflects the local authority's good performance of previous years. Post-16 education is a strength with over 80% of providers judged good or better at their last inspection. The large majority of primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, pupil referral units and children's homes are at least good. The overall quality of early years and childcare provision has improved during the year, but is still not as good as that found in similar areas. Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe and to achieve well educationally are good or better in the very large majority of services. However, this positive overall picture contrasts with the weakest area of provision locally: the local authority fostering service is only satisfactory and its adoption service is inadequate.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a broad balance of strengths, satisfactory features and areas for development. While one area for priority action was also identified, this was not judged to be a serious weakness which placed children at risk of inadequate protection or significant harm.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes almost all of the main measures of educational attainment. Children in the reception year and at the end of primary school do better than the average for similar areas. GCSE results for 16-year-olds are in the top 25% of all local authorities in England, but closer to the average for similar areas. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds in education, training or work has been well above average for some years. However, at age 19, the number of young people from low-income families gaining qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs, or two A-levels, has been below average for some years and fell further in 2009.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the local authority adoption service.
- Improve early years and child care provision so that more is good or better.
- Improve educational outcomes at age 19 for young people from low income families.

Outcomes for children and young people

Provision to support children and young people in living healthy lives is good or better in the very large majority of settings and services. The number of young women under 18 getting pregnant is below average, having reduced by some 30% in the ten years to 2008. However in a few places, such as Gloucester city, the number of pregnancies in the under-16 age group has continued to rise. Steps have been taken to strengthen services for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties, but the local authority and its partners recognise that gaps remain in provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of six- and 11-year-olds who are seriously overweight is broadly average, but falling faster than the average for the younger age group.

The large majority of individual services and settings make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. Provision for safeguarding overall and for children in care is adequate. The inspection of front-line child protection services found well-developed arrangements for assessing the needs of children and young people based on good work between the different agencies involved. The creation of four assessment teams across the county is enabling the local authority and key partners to respond more effectively to local demands and circumstances. However, inspectors also found that some of the work to assess the risks to children was poor and action to remedy this is a top priority. The most recent data show that only half of initial assessments and two thirds of core assessments were completed on time. The quality of children's homes is good overall. The fostering service is satisfactory, but significant weaknesses were found in the adoption service. Both services have had some difficulty addressing the full range of recommendations of previous inspections, but are now making progress.

Provision to help children and young people achieve educationally and to enjoy their learning is good or better in the very large majority of services and settings. The quality of primary and secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units is good overall. At the end of the reception year and the last year in primary school, children do better than the average in similar areas. This includes children from low-income families and those with special educational needs. Results for 16-year-olds are in line with the average for similar areas and in the top 25% of all local authorities in England. The gap in attainment between those from low-income families and the majority at this age is closing, but this is not the case for those with special educational needs. Behaviour in secondary schools is good overall and persistent absence rates are comparatively low. However, the number of young people excluded permanently from school is consistently above the average for similar areas and not falling.

Arrangements to encourage children and young people to have a say in decision making are well developed. A Participation Charter, which sets out what young people can expect from providers, has been piloted in a cross section of organisations and is now being implemented across the county. The youth offending service was judged to be good overall at its recent inspection, but weaknesses were

found in the links with children's social care services. Re-offending by young people is comparable with similar areas.

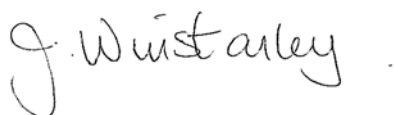
Children and young people overall get good support to do well in adult life from the very large majority of services. Local colleges are doing good work to improve outcomes for learners of all ages. The number of young people in work, training or education has been well above average for many years. The number gaining good qualifications at age 19 is in line with the average and improving at about the same rate as in similar areas. However, outcomes for those from low-income families are much less positive, with fewer gaining good qualifications than is the case elsewhere. Effective action is taken to ensure that the very large majority of young offenders are in suitable education and training placements, but the picture is not nearly as good for young people leaving care. Improving opportunities for children and young people in and leaving care remains a key local priority.

Prospects for improvement

Children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. Local plans are rooted in extensive consultation with children and young people and set out a clear vision for the area. Priorities focus on the right things and link coherently to council-wide strategies and ambitious local targets. For example, tackling health inequalities and child poverty is a major focus. Good performance has been maintained in education services and the gap in attainment between groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and the majority of children and young people is closing. However there is more to do to ensure that social care provision is of consistently good quality and that links between key partners are strengthened further. Focused and sustained action is now needed in the adoption service to build on the encouraging, but early, signs of improvement identified by inspectors. The local authority has good awareness of the strengths and areas for development in its front-line child protection services. Elected members and senior managers have given high priority to this area, which has led to restructuring the service and increased funding for additional social work posts.

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