

9 December 2010

Mr David Williams
Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham DH1 5UJ

Dear Mr Williams

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.

Durham County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Durham County Council perform adequately.

In 2009, a transitional year, Durham was assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is not enough good or better provision, particularly universal provision, to meet the minimum requirements for that grade.

Inspections show that the adequate provision is in early years and childcare, half of the secondary schools and eight of the 15 school sixth forms. The majority of the local authority children's homes, including the secure unit and private children's homes, are good. The special schools and the pupil referral unit are also strong, as is much of the nursery and primary schools provision. The colleges are at least good. The local fostering and adoption agencies are outstanding.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests and examinations are at least in line with similar areas. Results for young people from low-income families have improved; however, 16- and 19-year-olds from low-income families do less well than others of the same age in similar areas. Recent data show that the number of young people not in work, education or training, although above similar areas, is reducing. Health outcomes are improving and the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is reducing. The proportion of young people who say that they have been drunk or taken drugs is above similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve the schools' sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Increase further the proportion of 16- and 19-year-olds from low-income families who gain good qualifications.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives have been successful and outcomes for children and young people are improving. Nearly all schools, colleges and children's homes are rated highly in their inspections on how well they contribute to promoting healthy lifestyles. The local authority recognises that more needs to be done in some areas. For example, although the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is reducing, the

2009–2012 Children and Young People's Plan recognises that further actions are needed to target specific geographical areas. The sex and relationship education programme in all schools is yet to have consistent impact across Durham. Access to services for children and young people who have emotional or mental health difficulties are being strengthened.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. Ofsted's inspections of schools and colleges confirm this. The local authority is effective at ensuring that children are safe in the community and works well with schools to address issues, in particular bullying. The 2009–2012 Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates that anti-bullying strategies are having a positive impact and the proportion of children who say they have been bullied matches similar areas. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that improvements in the quality of referrals have ensured that children and families receive a prompt level of service. It also found that more assessments are completed on time. Local services work well together, for example with the police or health, to protect children at risk of harm. There is, however, an above average number of children who are admitted to hospital because they are injured either accidentally or deliberately.

Nurseries and primary schools, the pupil referral unit, special schools and the colleges are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. At the end of primary school, children do as well in national tests as those in similar areas. Provision is less strong in secondary schools. At the time of their last inspection, half were required to raise achievement and improve standards in one or several subjects. The local authority reports that GCSE results have improved significantly in these schools. The overall 2010 provisional results show that over half of young people now gain five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics. The local authority acknowledges that half of the schools' sixth forms need to raise standards further. The additional support for specific groups, for example to improve the educational outcomes of young people with special educational needs, has had a positive impact and these young people do as well as similar groups nationally. The Children and Young People's Plan gives high priority to raising aspirations and ensuring educational success, especially where levels of poverty are high. This is because young people from low-income families do not do as well as their peers. The project *AB@H (Aspirations Begin at Home)* is aiming to address these inequalities.

Schools and colleges are good at involving young people in making decisions and encouraging participation in positive activities in their communities. Children's homes are also mostly good in ensuring that young people contribute to the running of the home. Local services have successful arrangements for ensuring that children and young people influence developments. For example *The Hub*, *Share-Street* and the *Spice Project* have been designed to make communication easier, provide better access to information and encourage young people to be active citizens. The *GetOutThere* website was launched in January 2008 and young people have been given some funding to lead projects themselves. The inspection of the youth offending service reported that there was plenty of very good practice to support

individual young people who had offended. The Pre-Reprimand Disposal initiative has reduced the number of first-time offenders from over 1,000 in 2007-08 to less than 400 in 2009-10. A range of strategies are in place to reduce re-offending. An above average number of young people say that they have been drunk or taken drugs and steps are being taken to tackle this.

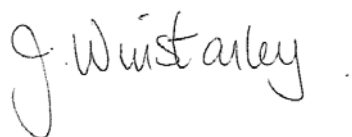
More 19-year-olds achieve the qualifications they need for future jobs or study and results match similar areas. The local authority knows that young people from low-income families do not do as well as all young people of the same age. This is a key priority for improvement. Realistic targets have been set to reduce the number of 16- to 18-years-olds not in work, education or training. Most young people leaving care are in education, work or training and have a suitable place to live. Schools are committed to raising aspirations but some schools' sixth forms are more adequate than good at developing essential business skills and helping young people make informed and confident choices about life after school. The colleges are at least good and there is some outstanding practice. For example, an Ofsted survey of post-16 provision has shown that there is excellent practice locally to ensure that young people gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

Prospects for improvement

Although progress has been made in important areas, particularly in improving GCSE results, in reducing offending and improving health outcomes, more is required to improve the proportion of good or better early years and childcare settings, secondary schools and sixth forms. Ofsted's monitoring visits to the weaker schools report that the local authority supports these schools effectively. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that the Local Safeguarding Children Board undertakes regular monitoring and audits of safeguarding services to ensure that practice is of a sufficiently high quality. The inspection of the youth offending service reported that staff are keen to learn and develop the service further and that, consequently, prospects for future improvements are promising. The Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good understanding of strengths and of areas where further improvements are required. Issues chosen for renewed focus in the 2010–2011 Action Plan confirm that tackling inequalities in outcomes for children and young people who face particularly difficult circumstances is a key priority for the local authority and its partners.

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, reading 'J. Winstanley'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment