

9 December 2010

Mr John Nash  
Director for Children's Services  
Dorset County Council  
County Hall, Colliton Park  
Dorchester, Dorset  
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Dear Mr Nash

## 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 Dorset County Council, 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, the minimum requirements for each grade outlined in the guidance do not alone define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Dorset County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Dorset County Council perform well, as they did in 2009.

Overall, the large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The overall quality of day-care provision for very young children is adequate. However, education for this group is outstanding, as is the quality of primary schools, secondary schools and school sixth forms. Also, every one of the special schools and pupil referral units in the area are at least good and two are outstanding. There are no inadequate schools at all, which is an improvement from last year. One of the two general further education colleges in the area is good and the other is satisfactory. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are good. However, only one of its three main children's homes comes up to this standard.

The local authority's front-line child protection services have a number of strengths and several areas needing development, but no areas for priority action.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes all the main measures of educational attainment. However, it is only at age five that pupil attainment is well above the average in similar areas. Throughout their education, children and young people from low-income families achieve significantly better than the average for this group elsewhere. The attainment in national tests of those with special educational needs is also significantly better than the average elsewhere.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve front-line child protection services.
- Increase the proportion of local authority children's homes which are good or better.

### Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. The proportion of children who are seriously overweight at ages five and 11 is broadly average. However, whereas the figure for five-year-olds has improved over recent years, the figure for 11-year-olds has got worse. The number of children and young people who regularly take part in sport is significantly higher than found nationally. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is lower than the average for similar areas and much lower than found nationally. However, the number has gone up in recent years and the overall reduction over the last decade has been modest, similar to the national picture.

The very large majority of individual services, for example schools, make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. The local authority's front-line child protection services have a number of strengths and several areas needing development, but no areas for priority action. Steps are being taken, similar to elsewhere in the country, to improve multi-agency working and, in particular, to improve both the early identification of problems and the provision of support before they become very serious. However, the new ways of working have some way to go before they are fully established. There is some effective specialist work to prevent young people from having to come into care and the local authority's fostering and adoption services are good. However, only one of the three main children's homes run by the local authority itself is good and the others are satisfactory. The private and voluntary sector homes it uses are only a little better. The frequency of placement change for children in care is broadly in line with the average nationally, but the average length of placement does not compare well.

Provision to help children and young people achieve more educationally is a strength overall. The quality of day-care provision for very young children is only adequate and below the national average. However, education for this group is outstanding and much better than average. The same applies to primary and secondary schools. Also, every one of the special schools and pupil referral units in the area is at least good and two are outstanding. There are no inadequate schools at all, which is an improvement from last year, and only one primary school fails to meet minimum requirements for pupil attainment. Assessments of children's development at age five are much better than the average in similar areas. At ages 11 and 16, test and exam results are broadly in line with the similar area average, although the rate of improvement over recent years has been slower than that found nationally. Throughout their education, children and young people from low-income families achieve significantly better than the average for this group elsewhere. Very substantial progress has been made in improving their performance at age 11 and the gap between them and other pupils at this age has narrowed a lot. By contrast there has been no progress in narrowing the gap at age 16 and little in terms of the numbers achieving a qualification equal to five good GCSEs by the age of 19. However, there has been significant improvement in the numbers achieving a qualification equal to two good A levels by 19 and the gap in such respects has narrowed significantly. The achievement in national tests of those with special educational needs is significantly better than the average elsewhere, both at age 11 and age 16. The local special schools are also all good or better, which is much higher than the national average. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest level of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests.

Behaviour in secondary schools is very good and the number of permanent exclusions very low. Re-offending by young people is better than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending team works reasonably well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services to seek young people's views and involve them in decision making.

The very large majority of services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. The overall standard of school sixth forms is outstanding and

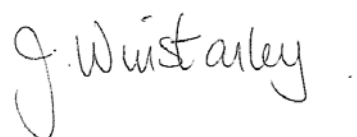
much better than seen nationally. However, only one of the two general further education colleges is good. The other, and much the larger of the two, is only satisfactory. The one independent specialist college is also satisfactory. The three colleges cater for just over 25% of the young people in the 16 to 19 age group who attend education and training provision in the area. The number of young people aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training is broadly average. The proportion achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs by age 19 is very similar to the average in similar areas, as is the proportion achieving qualifications equal to two good A levels. As with pupil attainment at age 16, the rate of improvement over recent years has been slower than that found nationally.

### **Prospects for improvement**

The large majority of services are already of good quality and outcomes for children and young people compare well with elsewhere. However, whilst there are some important areas of activity where significant improvement has been delivered in recent years, educational attainment by young people overall has not gone up as fast as attainment nationally. Considerable work has gone into restructuring and improving services and these are showing signs of bearing fruit, particularly in the provision of support for young people with problems. The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs and use this to set clear and appropriate improvement priorities.

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