

9 December 2009

Mr John Nash
Director for Children's Services
Dorset County Council
County Hall
Colliton Park
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 1XJ

Dear Mr Nash

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
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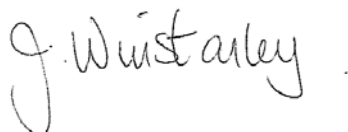
Children's services in Dorset County Council perform well.

In the joint area review held in the autumn of 2007, provision for safeguarding and looked after children was judged to be adequate and that for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was judged to be good. The overall effectiveness of close to a large majority of inspected services and settings is good or better. Within this, school-based provision of all kinds is a comparative strength, with the overall quality of provision being consistently well above the national average. Whilst the local authority's fostering service is good, children's home provision is a comparative weakness, with four out of five homes judged to be only adequate. However, the very large majority of inspected services and settings is judged to make a good or better contribution to keeping children and young people safe and helping them to achieve educationally.

In terms of performance indicators, a very large majority of the local authority's figures are at least in line with both the statistical neighbour and national averages. The same applies to the indicators in the staying safe and enjoying and achieving groupings. For four of the six indicators which measure the gap in outcomes for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, the gap narrowed between the current year and the last.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA