

9 December 2010

Mr Chris Pratt
Director of Children's Services
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Floor 4, The Council House
College Road
Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN1 3AD

Dear Mr Pratt

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.

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council perform poorly.

In 2009, Ofsted noted a number of concerns about children's services in Doncaster. Some improvements were found in an unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in January 2010 but practice was not consistent and there was still some potential for children to be left at risk. A Corporate Governance Inspection led by the Audit Commission with Ofsted participation took place in February 2010 in response to concerns about corporate governance across the local authority as a whole, including the performance of children's services. The report found that there were clear failings in children's services, and whilst prospects for the future looked more promising than they had done for a while, the inspection judged children's services to be weak.

Only a minority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Many of the local authority's primary and special schools perform well, with 20% of primary schools being outstanding. However, secondary schools and school sixth forms are not doing as well and too few are good or better. The local fostering and adoption agencies are satisfactory. Provision in children's homes is variable in quality and two of the local authority's homes for children in care are inadequate.

National performance measures show the large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. However, indicators for economic well-being are not as strong. Results in national tests are similar to those elsewhere for 11-year-olds. However, in 2009 16-year-olds did not do as well as their peers in similar areas. Provisional results for 2010 suggest a marked improvement which is closing the gap with the national average. Although 19-year-olds from Doncaster do not gain as many qualifications as those from similar areas and the number who gain two A levels or equivalent qualifications is particularly low, the trend of improvement over the last three years is better than the average for similar areas. With the exception of children at the end of the Reception year, and those aged 11 who have special educational needs, the differences in achievement between children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and their peers are getting smaller over time at all ages.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the overall quality of safeguarding, particularly in front-line services.
- Improve the overall effectiveness of children's homes.

- Improve the quality of secondary schools and school sixth forms.
- Increase the number of young people who gain qualifications at the age of 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

Most types of services and settings successfully encourage children and young people to live healthy lives. Primary and special schools, children's homes and the local fostering agency are particularly good at this. Performance is not as strong in pupil referral units. Too few mothers still breast-feed their babies at six weeks and this number has not improved over time. The number of children who are too overweight at the age of five went down in 2009 but since 2005 the number has gone up at this age and at the age of 11. Fewer children say they take part in sport regularly than elsewhere and fewer are satisfied with local parks. The number of young women under 18 who become pregnant is high in Doncaster and is not reducing as fast as elsewhere. There is now a new approach to tackling this in the local area which also looks at the part played by emotional issues and substance misuse. Good outcomes are seen in the reasonably high rate of screening for chlamydia and in fewer young people than in similar areas saying they have been drunk or taken drugs recently.

The local authority is aware from both external reporting and its own analysis that there is much to do to ensure children are safe. Concerns include consistency of practice and the number of initial and core assessments that are completed on time. Historically the service has not been well resourced. This has been recognised and social worker and management capacity has been improved. Changes are making social workers' caseloads more manageable and the quality and availability of training for staff is good. There is evidence of improved quality in serious case reviews. Most recent data show that more work is still needed to improve the stability of placements for children in care. Ofsted's inspections show that most services and settings take good care to safeguard children and young people. Local actions to ensure that children are safe within the community have a similar rate of success as those elsewhere. The number of children and young people admitted to hospital as a result of deliberate or accidental injury has reduced well over time.

Primary and special schools and children's homes show particularly good performance in helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Secondary schools and the local fostering agency are not as good at this, although recent monitoring visits show some improvement in the schools. Although fewer primary schools reached the expected standards in 2009, the number of secondary schools increased. At the end of their Reception year in school children do better than those in similar areas. By the age of 11, children do as well in national tests as those in similar areas but the gap between them and their peers who have special educational needs is too wide. Fewer young people than in similar areas gain five or more good GCSEs at the age of 16, although there was an improvement in the number achieving two good grades in science in 2009. Provisional results for

2010 overall suggest a marked improvement which is closing the gap between performance locally and the national average. Standards of behaviour in secondary schools are too low and the number of secondary pupils who are often absent from school is higher than the national average.

Inspection shows mixed success in the ability of services and settings to enable children and young people to take part in decision-making and activities in their local community. Primary and special schools are particularly good and this was seen as a key strength in the inspection of the local fostering service. A recent re-inspection of the local further education college noted that students were increasingly involved in making decisions in college and participating in activities in the local community. The college's student parliament involves a range of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Across the local area a very good number of 15-year-olds take part in organised activities. The rate of re-offending by young people in Doncaster is lower than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works well. However, the number of young people who receive a custodial sentence has risen. After a decline in performance there has been a return to the previous very high figure in the number of young people who have offended and who are in education, training or work.

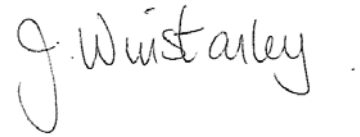
Too few services and settings make a good contribution to preparing young people for post-16 education, work and training. The local authority knows that not all young people do as well as they can at the age of 19, and this is a key priority for improvement. The trend of improvement over the last three years is better than the average for similar areas. The gap in attainment between those from low-income families and the majority of young people at the age of 19 is also closing. Encouragingly, the number of young people not in education, work or training has reduced steadily over time and is slightly better than that of similar local authorities. Although still low when compared with national figures, there have been good improvements in the number of care leavers in education, work or training and in the number who are given a suitable place to live when they leave care.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority is well aware of the work it needs to do to bring about sustained progress in making children's services better and its revised Improvement Plan is clear about what needs to be done. The new leadership team is open, honest and realistic about the work ahead and has the continued commitment of the lead member. As a result of a statutory direction from the Secretary of State the local authority has an independently chaired Board to oversee improvement. The Corporate Governance Inspection acknowledged some progress, such as improved access to placement for the most vulnerable children and the continuing high quality of the youth service. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. There have also been some improvements made in the quality of the local authority's fostering and adoption services.

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