

9 December 2010

Mr Bruce Buckley  
Strategic Director for Children and Younger Adults  
Derbyshire County Council  
County Hall, Matlock  
Derbyshire, DE4 3AG

Dear Mr Buckley

## **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.

## Derbyshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

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

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, all local authority special schools are good, as is much childcare provision and almost all nursery and primary schools. Five of the eight pupil referral units are good and the others at least adequate. However, secondary schools and school sixth forms are not doing as well with only about a half good or better. Three secondary schools were shown to be failing to provide a satisfactory quality of education during the last year; however, Ofsted monitoring reports illustrate good support from the local authority to bring about the necessary improvements. One of two further education colleges closed during the last year and the remaining one is good. Local authority and private fostering agencies are good and the adoption agency adequate. Seven of the 12 local authority children's homes are good, although one inspected in July 2010 was judged to be inadequate.

A very recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that is satisfactory and no areas for priority action. Strengths include the highly effective practice in the arrangements for assessing the needs of disabled children. A joint area review in December 2007 reported that provision for looked after children is good.

National performance measures show almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests and examinations are above national averages for 11-year-olds. Sixteen-year-olds do as well as their peers elsewhere. However, 16-year-olds from low-income families do not do as well. Each year, more 11-year-olds with special educational needs are achieving well, but by the age of 16 the difference between their achievement in national tests and their peers is getting wider. Nineteen-year-olds from low-income families gain as many qualifications as those from similar backgrounds across the country, but the latest results show a slight decline.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools and school sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Increase the number of young people from low-income families who gain qualifications at the age of 19.

## **Outcomes for children and young people**

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are usually successful. Almost all childcare provision, schools and pupil referral units promote healthy outcomes well, although not all children's homes are as good. Health outcomes in some areas of Derbyshire are not as good as in others, for example in Bolsover and Chesterfield there is a higher than average number of teenage conceptions and improving this is the focus of local action. Across the county, rates of teenage pregnancy are low and falling more rapidly than seen nationally. Fewer children are obese at the age of five and 11 than elsewhere, but rates are increasing. Parents and carers of disabled children are positive about local services.

Ofsted inspections of schools, colleges and children's homes confirm that the arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. Local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm and use a common approach for assessing and meeting their needs. Action taken to support families in difficulty is keeping the proportion of children in care below most similar area and national figures. However, too many children are becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time, suggesting support is being removed too soon. Recent data show that although there are delays in completing initial assessments, more core assessments are being completed within the recommended timescale. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified that not all staff undertaking referral and assessment work are suitably qualified or experienced. However, the quality of core assessments is usually good. The children's rapid response team provides a good out-of-hours service. There are some strengths in the arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community. For example, numbers killed or seriously injured on the roads are lower than similar areas and a recent survey found that the number of young people feeling bullied is no higher than elsewhere. Addressing children and young people's concerns in this area continues to be a priority for the local authority.

Almost all child carers, nursery and secondary schools and colleges are good at helping children and young people enjoy their learning. This is reflected in above average achievement, high attendance rates and good behaviour in almost all secondary schools. The youngest children achieve well at the age of five but fewer than elsewhere make the expected progress in primary school, especially in English. Standards overall at the age of 16 are higher than elsewhere, but over time have not improved as quickly as national figures. Some groups of young people, such as those from low-income families, minority ethnic groups and children in care, do not do as well. The local authority is alert to this and is targeting activity to challenge schools and support particular groups who need additional help to improve faster. In both primary and secondary schools, children and young people with special educational needs do better each year, but not as well as similar groups nationally. Although rising, the number of children in care achieving the expected level at the age of 16 is below average.

Successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for a long time. Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision-making and activity in their communities. However, secondary sixth forms, pupil referral units and children's homes are less consistently seen to be good in this area. The number of young people reporting to have misused drugs or alcohol is reducing, but remains high. The number of young people offending for the first time has fallen and there has been a good reduction in the number of young offenders who are sentenced to custody.

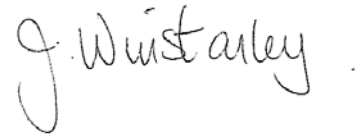
The local authority and its partners have recognised the impact of the recession on economic outcomes for young people. Low aspiration in some areas is undermining participation, with a higher than average number of young people who start courses at the age of 16 dropping out by the age of 17. Despite this, each year more young people are gaining higher level qualifications by the age of 19 and increasing numbers of young people are completing apprenticeships and performance is in line with similar areas. More young people from low-income families are obtaining good qualifications each year, although the gap with their peers is not closing. Sixth forms and colleges offer good support in helping young people to gain the skills and qualifications needed for future jobs, but only about two-thirds of secondary schools are good at this. Positively, a higher than average proportion of care leavers and young offenders are found suitable placements in education, employment or training.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Most outcomes for children and young people are improving in Derbyshire. The Children and Young People's Plan for 2009–12 is fully incorporated into the local authority's key strategic plans for the future. A recent review of the plan demonstrates good progress in important areas and pays particular attention to those groups whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. Alternative action is taken where insufficient progress has been made; for example, the redirection of activity leading to a faster than average reduction of teenage conceptions. Projects and targeted activity are appropriately focused on socially deprived areas or groups with the greatest need and informed by the experiences of service users and their families. Tackling the right priorities and good partnership working is demonstrated in a track record of improvement across outcomes for children. Front-line child protection services are developed using timely and good quality performance management information. The school improvement service is effective in challenging weaker schools and the time it takes for them to improve is shorter than found elsewhere. The youth offending service is effective, with good capacity and capability to sustain and improve local performance.

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 large initial 'J' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment