

9 December 2010

Ms Julia Morrison  
Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Cumbria County Council  
5 Portland Square  
Carlisle, Cumbria CA1 1PU

Dear Ms Morrison

## 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.

## Cumbria County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
---------------------------------------	--------------------------

Children's services in Cumbria County Council have improved and now perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding. Most nursery, primary and secondary schools, secondary school sixth forms and special schools are good. The proportion of good and outstanding secondary schools has increased during the last year, but a third remains only adequate. Most further education colleges and the sixth form college are good, with one college only satisfactory. Of the 23 secondary sixth forms, most of which are good or better, nine are satisfactory. All secondary special sixth forms are good or better. Three pupil referral units are satisfactory and one is good; this is an improvement on last year. Two independent residential schools for children with special educational needs are outstanding and one managed by another local authority is satisfactory. About one-third of childcare provision is only satisfactory, which is too much. Inadequate provision includes two special schools, one maintained secondary school, one academy and five primary schools. Of the 24 children's homes in Cumbria, six are managed by the local authority and 18 by the private and voluntary sector; of these, four private children's homes, which are not used by the local authority, are inadequate. Local adoption and fostering arrangements are good. The very large majority of services and settings are good or better at helping children and young people stay safe and achieve well in their education.

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

National performance measures show nearly all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or similar areas, as are the very large majority of educational attainment and progress indicators. The achievement of five-year-olds is below that found in similar areas but as they progress through primary schools, pupils make good progress and results in national tests for 11-year-olds are as good as those in similar areas and improving. At the end of secondary schooling, 16-year-olds, including those from low-income families, do as well as their peers elsewhere, but those with special educational needs do not. The proportion of 19-year-olds who gain good qualifications is increasing well, although outcomes are not as positive for those from low-income families.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve outcomes for children in their early years, including childcare provision and standards at early years foundation stage.

- Improve secondary schools and secondary school sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Improve outcomes for 16-year-olds with special educational needs.

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

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. All schools and children's homes are good at this, but the pupil referral units do not do as well. Almost all schools participate in the Healthy Schools programme. Take-up of school lunches in primary and secondary schools is better than that found in similar areas. More children take part in physical education and sport than last year and slightly fewer children are very overweight at the age of five. The local authority has seen an increase in the numbers of schools participating in regular height and weight trials and this is contributing to gradual reductions. Breast-feeding rates have not changed significantly from last year and remain lower than in similar areas. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is close to the national average, but progress in reducing the rate has been much slower than elsewhere. In response, the local authority is re-designing and increasing sexual health services to include the further education colleges.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in most settings and services. Safeguarding is regarded as 'everybody's business' and local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm and to ensure support is targeted to the children and families that need it most. Most children's homes run by the local authority are good, as are stability of placements for children in care. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found very few areas needing further development. Where necessary, the local authority has acted swiftly to put any concerns right, with a strong focus on improving those systems that help keep children safe. In the community, the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has fallen steadily, although hospital admissions as a result of deliberate or accidental injury remain higher than the national average.

Most settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. One pupil referral unit judged to be inadequate last year is now satisfactory in this respect. The local authority is mostly successful in its work to help schools improve and recent inspection monitoring visits to weaker schools confirm this. Achievement of children at the start of primary school is lower than in similar areas and in response, the local authority is trialling a number of projects to improve communication and language development for this age group. Primary schools are generally better than elsewhere and by the age of 11, children achieve good results in national tests; latest unvalidated results show improvement this year to be better than the regional average. Children with special educational needs at this age also do well when compared with similar areas. More secondary schools are now good or better but over a third are still only adequate, and one has a notice to improve. The number of 16-year-olds achieving good examination results is in line with similar

areas and for those from low-income families the gap in achievement has narrowed. This is not the case for 16-year-olds with special educational needs who do not do as well and achievement overall has declined over the past three years. Behaviour in secondary schools is good and persistent absence has continued to fall.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in decision-making and activities are good in nearly all settings. The local authority has introduced a number of creative ways to ask children and young people what they think about their local services and what needs to improve. These findings are used to review and shape plans. For example, the Parents Forum for children with disabilities and the Action4 group of children who are looked after are both vocal in helping the local authority make things better for those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. Larger numbers of young people take part in local community activities than in similar areas. In 2009, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation found the youth offending service working reasonably well overall. Rates of re-offending are falling and are better than similar areas although fewer young people who offend are in work, education or training than elsewhere.

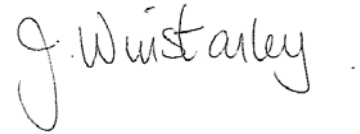
Most young people receive good support to gain the skills and qualifications needed to find work. The decreasing numbers of young people who are not in education, work or training show how well the area is doing to reduce these figures. Care leavers also have good success in finding appropriate work or training and a suitable place to live when they eventually leave care. Local targets have been achieved through good working partnerships between local colleges, businesses and the local authority; as a consequence, the range of jobs and opportunities for training has increased, but there is still more to do. Further education colleges and the sixth form college ensure good opportunities and outcomes for young people but too many secondary sixth forms are only adequate. While the number of young people aged 19 gaining good qualifications is similar to other areas, those from low-income families do less well and there has been very little improvement over time.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Many outcomes for children and young people are good and improving in Cumbria. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress in important areas. Improvements in its schools, in some health outcomes and in reducing the numbers of young people without a job or training shows that the local authority and its partners are making good decisions. There is strong commitment to build on good practice and to provide good value-for-money; for example, a major review of all schools is underway to increase the number of services available on-site and in response to falling pupil numbers in the more rural areas. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found good management support and effective systems in place for fieldwork staff. There is still work to be done to improve some settings and outcomes; for example, those secondary schools and secondary sixth forms which are only satisfactory, the attainment of children aged five and for those with special educational needs when they reach 16 years where the rate of improvement has been slow.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment