

9 December 2010

Ms Di Smith

Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Learners
London Borough of Croydon
Chief executive's office
7th Floor, Southside, Taberner House
Park Lane, London CR9 3JS

Dear Ms Smith

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.

London Borough of Croydon children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Croydon continue to perform adequately.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The quality of early years and childcare provision has improved since the last assessment but remains satisfactory overall. A very large majority of nurseries and early years education in primary schools is good or better. Only just over half of primary schools are good or better however and two schools are inadequate. The overall effectiveness of secondary schools is also satisfactory although there are no inadequate secondary schools and a third, including the three academies, are outstanding. After the age of 16, provision is mostly good with almost all school sixth forms good or better and a good general further education college. Sixth form colleges, however, are much weaker than average; one is only satisfactory and the other inadequate. Most local authority special schools are good but one is now inadequate, as are three of the six independent special schools located in the area. Pupil referral units, children's homes, fostering and adoption agencies are mostly good or better with no inadequate provision.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found strengths but also a significant number of areas for development, although none requiring priority action.

National measures of performance show the large majority of outcomes to be in line with appropriate comparators or better. Results in national tests for 11- and 16-year-olds are just above similar areas and young people do very well at the age of 19. Standards achieved by children and young people from families with low incomes at the age of 11, 16 and 19 are improving and are now higher than for similar areas. Attainment gaps between these young people and others in the borough have started to close although not consistently for all age groups. Too many pupils are still permanently excluded or absent from school, although the rates are reducing. Fewer than average care leavers have suitable places to live and too many are not in education, work or training.

Key areas for further improvement

- Improve primary and secondary schools and sixth form colleges so that more are good or better.
- Maintain the reducing rate of poor attendance and permanent exclusions from schools.

- Ensure young people leaving the care of the local authority have appropriate places to live and either work or continue in education or training.

Outcomes for children and young people

Ofsted inspections report that most schools, settings and colleges are good at helping children and young people adopt healthy lifestyles but pupil referral units need to do more. Children and young people are increasingly taking part in sport and getting regular exercise. Children who are too overweight reflect numbers in similar parts of the country, although there are differences across the borough and numbers are not reducing. Fewer young women under the age of 18 are getting pregnant, although this figure is not reducing as quickly as elsewhere. The local authority and its partners have improved services for emotional and mental health although more remains to be done to ensure children and young people have prompt responses to their needs.

Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe are mostly good or better across the range of services and settings. The joint area review in 2008 judged safeguarding and arrangements for looked after children and young people good. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found effective action to ensure that children at risk of immediate harm are safeguarded but a significant lack of resources to support children and families in need. Far fewer initial and full assessments of children's needs than average are completed promptly. Actions to keep children safe in their communities are generally effective. Progress has been made in reducing the number of children killed or seriously injured in road accidents although numbers have levelled off recently. Children and young people admitted to hospital because they are unintentionally or deliberately injured are, however, increasing slowly. In line with similar areas, approximately a quarter of children and young people report that they have been bullied. However, they report that problems are not dealt with well by schools and work is underway to bring about improvement in this area.

Despite the overall effectiveness of primary and secondary schools being lower than average, recently inspected schools are stronger and most schools are good at helping children learn. The local authority has been successful in reducing the numbers of schools which are not reaching the minimum standards for pupil performance. Improvements in standards achieved by five-year-olds slowed down last year, although they reflect similar areas. Steady progress is still being made in helping children under the age of five who are not doing so well to come up to the level of others of the same age. National test results for 11- and 16-year-olds are improving and are just above national and similar area averages. Black Caribbean children and young people continue to do worse than others in the borough, although standards are improving due to targeted action by the local authority. Test results for children and young people from families with low incomes are improving well and are now better than for similar areas. These young people are beginning to

catch up with their peers in the borough. Standards achieved by those with special educational needs reflect similar areas and are improving. Behaviour in secondary schools is improving. Numbers of young people with poor attendance in secondary schools are higher than in similar parts of the country but reducing faster.

Inspections have found institutions, services and settings mostly good or better in involving children and young people in activities in their communities, although sixth form colleges and independent special schools are less effective. The local authority recognises that more needs to be done to enable children to influence the development of services. Numbers of children and young people who are permanently excluded from school are high but reducing. Fewer young people are committing crimes for the first time and re-offending has reduced to below that in similar areas. The numbers of young offenders in education, work or training fell sharply recently however and are lower than average.

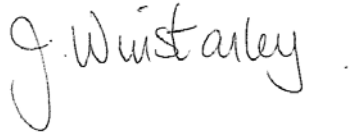
Children and young people are helped well to prepare for working life, although pupil referral units and children's homes are weak in this respect. Young people are encouraged very well to continue in education after the age of 16 or take-up training opportunities. Numbers who are not in education, work or training are reducing steadily, although they remain just above the average for similar areas. School sixth forms are mostly good and the general further education college is very effective at driving up standards. The borough is not, however, served well by its sixth form colleges. Despite this imbalance in the quality of provision, 19-year-olds do very well. Those from families with low incomes are beginning to catch up with others in the borough.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority is improving outcomes for children and young people in most areas and responds well to weaknesses identified through inspection. The Children and Young People's Plan and review clearly demonstrate a good awareness of the challenges facing the borough. There is effective joint working with partners such as the police and health. The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services confirmed the local authority is taking appropriate actions to reform services to improve children and young people's life chances but concluded that the use of common processes do not support inter-agency working fully. Additional resources have been allocated by the local authority to support children and families in need. Support to help schools improve is effective, as shown by Ofsted's recent monitoring visits to weaker schools. The youth offending service performs well and has good capacity to improve. Partners continue to do good work with children and young people to address gang culture and other matters which affect communities.

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, reading "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment