

9 December 2010

Mr Adrian Loades
Executive Director, Children and Young People's Services
Cambridgeshire County Council, Box No SS1001
Room B010 Castle Court, Shire Hall
Castle Hill, Cambridge
Cambridgeshire, CB3 0AP

Dear Mr Loades

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.

Cambridgeshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Cambridgeshire County Council continue to perform well.

The large majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, the local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good, as is much of the early years and childcare provision. Provision for children in council care has improved over the last year and now five of eight local authority homes are good. A very large majority of nursery and primary schools are good. Secondary schools and secondary sixth form providers do not do quite as well, with overall effectiveness being good or better in about a half. However, one sixth form college is outstanding and the other good. Two of four pupil referral units are outstanding and another good. The fourth, judged to be inadequate in 2009, is not improving quickly enough.

A full inspection of safeguarding arrangements reported that services were adequate. Recent improvements to local provision are increasing both the speed of change and the capacity of staff to deliver effective services. Services for looked after children are adequate. Inspection highlighted improvements in the stability of their placements and more young people being placed with foster carers rather than in residential placements.

National performance measures show outcomes are almost always in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests are in line with similar areas at both 11 and 16 years of age. More 16-year-olds achieve five A* to C grades in GCSE examinations than is found nationally. More young people with special educational needs do well at the age of 16 than others of the same age elsewhere. However, there is a widening gap in the achievement of 11- and 19-year-olds from low-income families and that of their peers in Cambridgeshire.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Increase the number of young people from low-income families who attain nationally expected levels at age 11 and gain higher level 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 almost always successful. Nearly all schools and children's homes are good at this. The local authority has exceeded its target for providing children and young people with access to parks and play areas in their local area. Fewer children than

elsewhere are too overweight and almost all are actively involved in at least the recommended amount of physical education and sport each week. Most children and young people say they have good relationships with friends and family and there is good access to emotional and mental health services. Parents of disabled children show higher than average levels of satisfaction with local health services. Cambridgeshire has a low rate of teenage conceptions, and the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than nationally. Fewer 16-year-olds report that they have recently been drunk or taken drugs than in similar areas.

On-going improvements to safeguarding arrangements and service delivery impact positively on outcomes for children and young people. Inspections by Ofsted of schools and colleges show that almost all have good safeguarding arrangements. Inspection of local authority safeguarding services identified improved recruitment with more children now allocated a qualified social worker, although the time taken to complete some important assessments continues to be too long. There are strengths in the arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within their community. For example, fewer children and young people than nationally are admitted to hospital because of deliberate or accidental injury and reducing numbers of children are killed or seriously injured on the roads each year. Although fewer young people report feeling bullied than in similar areas this continues to be a concern for them and has been incorporated as an area for action in the Children and Young People's Plan.

Child carers, nurseries, secondary schools and colleges are usually good at helping children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. Provision in pupil referral units and special schools is almost always good. Almost all primary schools help children to make the expected progress as they move through primary school and almost three quarters do well in national tests. Standards continue to rise in secondary schools and by the age of 16 more than a half of young people gain five or more good grades at GCSE; this is better than elsewhere. Those from most minority ethnic groups often do well. Although children in care and those with special educational needs often achieve well, those from low-income families fall further behind their peers at age 11 years.

Successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for some time. Children and young people are involved in designing and developing service delivery plans; for example, involvement in commissioning anti-bullying activities. Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision making and activity in their communities, although children's homes are not always good at this. The number of young people offending for the first time is reducing each year, although it is still higher than similar areas. Re-offending by young people remains higher than in similar areas. Successful promotion of inclusive activities for all is demonstrated in increasing numbers of young people finding interesting things to do with their time. Disabled young people are supported to attend local youth activities by inclusion workers.

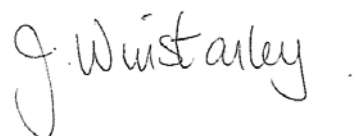
Most young people receive good support in secondary schools to gain the skills and qualifications needed for future jobs, but local college provision, special schools and children's homes do not always do well in this area. Overall, the number of students achieving good qualifications is similar to elsewhere, but young people from low-income families do not do as well at the age of 19. This is a key priority for improvement as the difference in their achievements and their peers is greater than found elsewhere. More young people, including care leavers, stay in education and training than is found nationally. However this is not the case for young offenders and too few are supported into positive activity.

Prospects for improvement

Almost all outcomes for children and young people are good or improving. A locally commissioned review of progress made in delivering actions in the Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates a clear understanding of the impact of current provision. It reports success in exceeding agreed targets and identifies where further action is required. Good use is made of information that allows the local authority and partners to compare performance with similar areas and the national picture. A recent safeguarding inspection reported that political and managerial leadership demonstrate good ambition and commitment to service improvement. However, it also identified that effective performance management and continuous improvement are not consistently evident in all service areas. Tackling the right priorities and good partnership working are demonstrated through federating schools to improve outcomes, the focus on health inequalities and narrowing achievement gaps for those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. However, there remains work to improve the number of young people from low-income families who gain a qualification at the age of 19.

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