

9 December 2010

Dr Krutika Pau
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Dear Dr Pau

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 Brent children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Brent continue to perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding although a few are inadequate. Most do particularly well in supporting learning and achievement and slightly less for keeping children and young people safe. Almost all secondary schools are good or outstanding as are special schools and most provision for learning after the age of 16. Three of four pupil referral units are good or outstanding. For looked after children, fostering and adoption services are good. Provision for pupils in primary schools, from children's homes and for young children is weaker. The majority of nursery and primary schools are good. However, too many primary schools are only satisfactory and two are inadequate, one for the second time, so performance overall is not as strong as elsewhere. While three children's homes are good or outstanding, two are inadequate. One of the two is run by independent providers and is not used by the local authority. Early years and childcare is a key weakness because half of childminders and almost half of the provision for childcare is only satisfactory, although both show continuing improvement.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found significant strengths and no areas for priority action. Private fostering arrangements are good.

National measures of performance show the large majority of outcomes and all measures of educational attainment are at least in line with those for similar areas or nationally, although too few assessments of special educational needs are completed on time. Standards that are just below average for five-year-olds, average for 11-year-olds and above average for 16-year-olds, and at the age of 19, continue to rise. The achievement of children and young people from low-income families and those with special educational needs has improved; the former more quickly than in similar local authorities and nationally but the latter more slowly. Gaps in educational attainment for key vulnerable groups are smaller than comparators for 11-year-olds but mostly bigger for those aged five and 16. Some show little sign of closing and those for 11- and 16-year-olds with special educational needs have got consistently bigger.

Key areas for further development

- Improve primary schools, childminders, childcare and children's homes so that more are good or better.
- Close gaps in educational attainment, particularly for 11- and 16-year-olds with special educational needs.
- Increase the number of assessments of special educational needs that are completed on time.

Outcomes for children and young people

Most services and settings strongly encourage children and young people to live healthy lives, but childminders and childcare are weaker. Outcomes that are mostly in line with comparators show improvement, such as many more mothers that are now breast-feeding, more services that are now in place for children and young people with emotional or mental health difficulties and many more young people who are satisfied with parks and playgrounds. Numbers of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant have reduced faster than in similar local authorities and nationally, although fewer young mothers are now in education, training or work. However, children now report more difficulties in relating to friends and family, numbers taking part in sport regularly remain below the national average, and parents of children with disabilities are not as satisfied with services as those elsewhere.

The large majority of services and settings do well at keeping children and young people safe, although childminders, childcare, children's homes and the local authority's adoption agency show weaknesses. Within the community fewer children are killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents, and fewer are admitted to hospital because of accidental or deliberate injury. Far fewer children now feel bullied and fewer run away from home or care than nationally. In front-line child protection services, high numbers of initial and full assessments are now carried out on time. Inspection found good decisions made about risk of harm but assessments that varied in their analysis. All meetings to review plans to protect children from harm and almost all those to review plans for looked after children are now held on time but inspection found care plans were not always specific, measurable and supported with clear targets. While children in care have to change placements more often than nationally, the length of time they stay in the same place is about the same as the national average.

The very large majority of services and settings provide very good support for educational achievement, but childminders and childcare are weaker. Far fewer assessments of special educational needs are completed on time than nationally although showing improvement. The achievement of five-year-olds has improved quickly but the gap for those not doing as well as most children has not closed and remains bigger than comparators. Figures for 2010 show significant improvement. Pupils in primary schools make expected progress and test results for 11-year-olds have improved. The number of schools that do not meet the minimum standards for pupil performance has reduced from five to three and pupils from low-income families are improving faster than elsewhere in the country. Gaps for Black Caribbean and Somali pupils have also closed. Examination results for 16-year-olds have improved, including those for young people in care, and all schools are now meeting minimum educational standards, although young people from low-income families did far less well in 2009. Almost all secondary schools have standards of behaviour that are at least good and fewer pupils now have poor attendance.

Most services and settings help children and young people to contribute to their communities very well. Outcomes are mostly in line with comparators but some have not improved, such as fewer young people now taking part in organised activities in their area. The most recent local data show numbers of young people who break the law for the first time have reduced well and re-offending remaining on a par with similar areas. Although fewer young people who offend are in education, training or work, performance remains high.

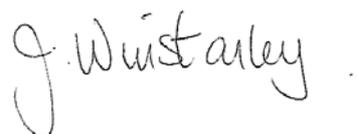
Services and settings are generally successful in helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being although primary schools and children's homes are weaker. Average numbers of 16- to 18-year-olds are in education, training or work. Nineteen-year-olds are increasingly better qualified, although those from low-income families did less well in 2009. Average numbers of care leavers are in education, training or work and almost all now have a suitable place to live.

Prospects for improvement

Outcomes are improving. Standards are rising and provisional results for primary school tests in 2010 show further improvement. However, too much provision in some settings is only satisfactory and gaps for most key vulnerable groups are not closing well enough. The Children and Young People's Plan has suitable priorities, including for the most vulnerable, and shows successful work with partners but its recent review does not include closing attainment gaps as a specific weakness. Ofsted's monitoring visits to satisfactory schools show satisfactory progress. The local authority's good support to inadequate primary schools helps them to make steady progress but one school has not built on this well enough. This good support has also helped two secondary schools to no longer need help to improve. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found good partnerships, good work on meeting cultural needs and particularly strong specialist support for very vulnerable children, young people and families. The youth offending service shows weaker performance than in similar authorities against some national measures but has good capacity and capability to improve.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment