

9 December 2010

Dr Deborah Absalom
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Dear Dr Absalom

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 Bexley children's services assessment 2010

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

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of early years and childcare settings provide a good start for the youngest children. The majority of primary and secondary schools are good or better and only two schools are inadequate. However, over a third of provision is only satisfactory and the proportion of primary and secondary schools that are good or better is lower than found elsewhere. Most sixth form provision in schools is at least good and the further education college is satisfactory. Three of the five local authority special schools are good and two are satisfactory. The Bexley pupil referral service is satisfactory. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are both good.

Ofsted's unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in October 2010 identified some strengths, many satisfactory aspects of practice and a number of areas for development. There are no very serious weaknesses requiring urgent action.

Most performance measures, including those for educational attainment, are at least in line with the appropriate comparator. However, the teenage pregnancy rate and childhood obesity levels are increasing. Strategies to reduce the difference between educational outcomes for children and young people from groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, such as those from low-income families and those with special educational needs, and others of the same age are bringing some success. For example, the number of five-year-olds from low-income families that are achieving a good level of development is improving at a faster rate than the average for similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the overall effectiveness of primary and secondary school provision so that more is good or better.
- Reduce the teenage pregnancy rate.
- Reduce childhood obesity.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services and settings for children and young people have good arrangements to encourage children to live healthily. Most performance measures show health outcomes that are in line with elsewhere and more children and young people are participating in sport than previously. However, childhood obesity continues to be a concern as rates for both five- and 11-year-olds increased

in 2009 and rates for 11-year-olds are higher than in similar areas. The local authority and its partners are aware of the issue and are looking at the needs of the area to form an action plan for improvement. A long-standing challenge is to reduce the numbers of teenagers who get pregnant. Strategies have not proved effective and since 2005 there has been an upward trend in both the number and rate of teenage conceptions. A new sexual health plan for 2010/2011 has been developed.

Overall, services and settings are good at helping children and young people to stay safe. The very recent inspection of front-line child protection services found no very serious weaknesses requiring urgent action, some strengths and a number of areas for development. The local authority continues to give priority to high quality induction, training and supervision for social care staff. The design and delivery of the contact and assessment service ensures very effective and timely support by senior staff to front-line practitioners. There is, however, scope to improve the effectiveness of preventative practice and early intervention from universal services, including schools and health visitors. Many satisfactory aspects of the service include assessments of children in need that are clear and analytical.

Most early years and childcare settings for the youngest children are of good quality overall. However, the proportion of primary and secondary schools that are good or better is lower than found elsewhere. Significantly higher numbers of five-year-olds achieved a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year at school than in previous years, bringing performance closer to the average for similar areas. The local authority is successfully narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving children and others at this age. By age 11, children's test results are in line with similar areas, with a positive trend of improvement despite a slight dip in 2009. Four primary schools did not meet the expected standard in these tests, the same number as in the previous year. GCSE results at age 16 have improved significantly and are in the top 25% of all local authorities in the country. All of Bexley's secondary schools reached the expected standard in results, an improvement from the previous year.

Children and young people have access to a wide range of positive opportunities to be involved in decision making and shaping services, such as: peer mentoring, volunteering, youth forums, the local Youth Council and Children's Parliament. The Bexley Youth Offending Service demonstrates that it is performing well against national performance measures and has good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance. The number of young people re-offending is lower than in similar areas.

Effective partnership working to lower the numbers of young people not in work, education or training continues to be successful. Numbers are reducing year on year and the pace of improvement is better than the average in similar areas. The numbers of young people who leave the local authority's care who are in work, education or training has also improved and is above the national average. More young people gained GCSE and A level qualifications or equivalent by the age of 19 than in previous years. There is a consistent trend of improvement and performance

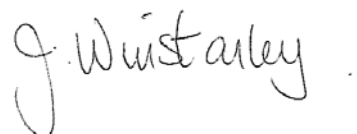
is in line with similar areas. Attainment has also improved for young people from low-income backgrounds and the difference in the numbers of young people from low-income backgrounds that get two A levels or equivalent qualifications and their peers has reduced.

Prospects for improvement

The Bexley Children and Young People's Plan 2009–2011 outlines clear priorities to further improve a broad range of outcomes. These priorities are appropriate and include some on-going challenges such as reducing the levels of childhood obesity and teenage pregnancy rates. Inspections demonstrate a number of positive outcomes over the last year, for example in the inspection of the local authority adoption agency. However, the overall effectiveness of both primary and secondary schools remains lower than elsewhere and too many are only satisfactory. The pupil referral service is satisfactory. The local authority has provided further training and support to both primary and secondary schools to ensure they are good at assessing the educational progress made by children and young people. Significant additional support through school improvement partners, external partners and London Challenge is being targeted at schools causing concern.

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