

9 December 2010

Ms Helen Jenner
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Town Hall, 1 Town Square
Barking, Essex
IG11 7LU

Dear Ms Jenner

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 in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 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, the minimum requirements for each grade outlined in the guidance do not alone define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham children's services assessment 2010

Children's service assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham perform adequately. In 2009, a transitional year, Barking and Dagenham was assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is not enough good universal provision to meet the minimum requirements for that grade.

The majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The special school in the borough is outstanding and the pupil referral unit is good. More childcare provision is good, but not enough childminders are as good as they could be. Primary schools are also not doing as well. Inspections show less than half are good or better and four are inadequate; two more than last year. Just over half of the secondary schools and school sixth forms are good, with four of the nine schools in the borough being outstanding. One school, Dagenham Park Church of England School, has changed its status and become a voluntary controlled school but has not yet been re-inspected. The further education college is good. The local fostering agency is outstanding and the adoption agency is good.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found some strengths, but more areas for development and an area for priority action. However, inspectors did not consider that the weaknesses identified during the inspection seemed to be putting children whose circumstances have made them vulnerable at risk of harm.

National performance measures show a large majority of outcomes, including those for educational attainment, are in line or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Examination results for 16- and 19-year-olds showed a big improvement in 2009, but not enough 19-year-olds gain as many qualifications as those in similar areas. Obesity levels among children remain high and too many young women under the age of 18 become pregnant.

Key areas for further development

- Improve primary schools so more are good or better.
- Maintain the momentum of improvement in standards for 16- and 19-year-olds.
- Reduce obesity levels among 11-year-olds.
- Reduce the number of young women who become pregnant.

Outcomes for children and young people

Healthy lifestyles are encouraged in almost all settings and services, although not as many childminders and secondary schools are as good as in the rest of England. Local knowledge of how many mothers are still breast-feeding their babies when they are six weeks old has improved; numbers are consistently higher than in similar areas. Reducing the high levels of obesity among children is a priority for local services in the borough because obesity levels remain high among five- and 11-year-olds. Strategies aimed at five-year-olds are being successful where the level of obesity is falling more rapidly than in similar areas. However, among 11-year-olds it continues to rise. This is despite a higher than average take up of school lunches in the borough's primary and secondary schools and more children regularly taking part in sporting activities. Preventative health care for children and young people in care is good. High numbers receive annual health and dental checks. However, in a recent survey they reported their relationships with friends and family are much worse than children in similar circumstances nationally.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are largely good, as is confirmed by Ofsted inspections of schools and the college. However, not enough childminders and secondary schools are good in this area. The local authority assesses outcomes overall for children and young people in safeguarding and for children in care as adequate with some areas of strength. An inspection of front-line child protection services in November 2009 found the emergency duty team arrangements are well coordinated with those of the assessment team, so an effective out-of-hours service is provided for children and their families. However, the number of referrals to social care which go on to be initially assessed is much lower than in similar areas and initial and full assessments of children's needs are very variable in quality. The stability of short term placements of children in care has improved significantly, but the stability of longer-term placements remains an area of concern. There are a number of strengths in arrangements for ensuring children are safe within the community. For example, partners continue to be effective in reducing the numbers of children killed or seriously injured in road accidents. In recent surveys, far fewer children feel they have been bullied than in similar areas.

The pupil referral unit, further education college and local adoption and fostering services are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The educational achievement of very young children in Barking and Dagenham has improved significantly in the last two years and performance is rapidly catching up with that of similar areas. Test results for 11-year-olds rose in 2009 and were much higher than in similar areas. The number of primary schools not reaching minimum expected standards fell from four to one in the same year. However, children of White British heritage do not achieve as well as those from other ethnic groups. Examination results for 16-year-olds increased by a large amount in 2009, whereas in the previous year they fell. Provisional results for 2010 indicate that results have risen by a large amount again, and the gap with the national average is rapidly narrowing. However, not enough 16-year-olds achieve two higher grades in science GCSEs or their equivalent. Behaviour in secondary schools is not as good as in the rest of England and permanent exclusions are high,

although actions to reduce them are being successful. The number of secondary school aged pupils who are often absent from school continues to fall and is much lower than in similar areas. Sixteen-year-olds with special educational needs or from low-income families achieve relatively well in secondary schools. However, the number of special educational needs assessments produced on time is well below average.

While many secondary schools and other services and settings are good at involving children and young people in decision making, the number of primary schools that are good in this area is well below average. Too many young women under the age of 18 become pregnant in Barking and Dagenham. It is one of only 21 local authorities that have not reduced conception levels since the baseline year. Nevertheless, the rise in 2008 was small and more recent figures provided by the local authority indicate it is continuing to fall. High numbers of young people are being tested for chlamydia and other sexually transmitted diseases. On most measures the youth offending service is performing excellently. Local partners know levels of serious youth crime in the borough are high and they are being successful in addressing this. Rates of re-offending are falling and fewer young people are offending for the first time. Good numbers of young offenders have access to suitable accommodation and more are taking part in education and training.

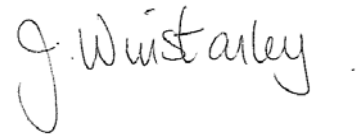
The local authority acknowledge that while there have been recent improvements in the number of 19-year-olds obtaining qualifications the proportion remains well below that found in similar areas. More young people are continuing with their learning when they are aged 16 and 17. The proportion of young people who take no part in education, training or work continues to fall and is now lower than in similar areas. However, not enough care leavers take part in education, work or training and too few are found a suitable place to live. Young people from low-income families achieve relatively well by the time they are aged 19, so the gap with their peers is much lower than average.

Prospects for improvement

The majority of outcomes for children and young people are improving in Barking and Dagenham. The local authority and its partners' review of the Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress has been made in important areas; it is also clear about what still needs to be done. For example, the local authority knows it needs to improve the quality of its primary schools, and permanent exclusions, though reducing, remain higher than average. The inspection of front-line child protection services found partners are working together well to ensure children and their families receive timely and appropriate support. However, managers in social care were carrying too many cases, so did not have sufficient capacity to effectively oversee the work of their teams. Ofsted monitoring visits to weaker schools show the local authority is providing schools with satisfactory support to get better. Nevertheless, in some cases necessary support has been put in place rather slowly.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment