

8 November 2011

Mr John Nash  
Director for Children's Services  
Dorset County Council  
County Hall  
Colliton Park  
Dorchester, Dorset  
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Dear Mr Nash

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011, explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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.

## Dorset County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Dorset County Council perform excellently. Performance has improved since 2010 when children's services were assessed as performing well. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and some schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in this assessment. Educational provision is consistently strong and registered day care provision for very young children has improved and is now good overall. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and help children and young people learn and stay safe.

A recent announced full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children reported that safeguarding arrangements are good as is provision for looked after children. Capacity to improve these services is also good and the leadership and management of safeguarding is outstanding.

### Strengths

- For children under the age of five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and in primary schools is good or outstanding. Young children's level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage improved further last year and is well above the average for similar areas and England overall. Children from families with low incomes also do much better than similar children elsewhere and are catching up with others of the same age in the county.
- The overall effectiveness of primary schools has improved further since the last assessment and the very large majority are good or better with over a third now outstanding. Standards achieved by 11-year-olds in national tests are consistently in line with averages for similar areas and the country overall, although there has been no improvement in recent years.
- Secondary education is outstanding, with the very large majority of schools good or better. National examination results for 16-year-olds have improved further and are better than in similar areas and elsewhere. Attainment for those from families with low incomes is improving and is now higher than in similar areas and the same when compared with the national picture.
- The large majority of secondary school sixth forms are good or better and one general further education college is good. By the age of 19, educational standards achieved are in line with similar areas and nationally and improving at similar rates. Young people from families with low incomes do better than in similar areas in the extent to which they

gain higher level qualifications equivalent to two good A levels and gaps with others in Dorset are narrowing, although not consistently.

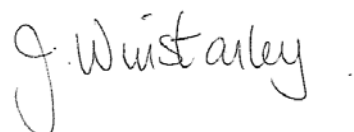
- Specialist provision is outstanding overall, none is inadequate and more special schools are now outstanding. All pupil referral units continue to be good. For looked after children, fostering and adoption services are good, as they were last year. Where the local authority commissions services, the very large majority of placements are with good or better fostering or adoption agencies and the large majority in good or better children's homes.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- There is some satisfactory provision which requires improvement. Although the quality of early years and childcare provision has improved since the last assessment, a third of registered childminder and day care settings are only satisfactory, as are the three children's centres. Two secondary schools and one special school, which were good in 2010, are now only satisfactory.
- Despite being a key area for improvement in the last assessment, three of the four local authority children's homes remain only satisfactory, with the fourth being good. One of the satisfactory homes is a small unit for emergency use and, as there were no residents at the time of inspection, could not be graded better than satisfactory.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment