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8 November 2011

Ms Jo Davidson
Interim Director of Children's Services
Herefordshire Council
Children's Services Directorate
Brockington, 35 Hafod Road
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Dear Ms Davidson

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.

Herefordshire Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Herefordshire Council perform well. Last year, they were assessed as performing adequately. In July 2010, an unannounced inspection was conducted of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection. This identified significant weaknesses in assessment and child protection processes which resulted in an area for priority action. In October 2010 a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children reported that services for looked after children were good and safeguarding services were adequate. The local authority had been prompt in tackling the area for priority action but many of the actions taken were still new and improvement was not yet embedded. Therefore, children's services overall were subsequently judged to be adequate.

In July 2011, a further unannounced inspection of front-line services took place. This confirmed that the area for priority action from July 2010 had been tackled. There were no further areas for priority action. The report identified a particular strength in the highly effective arrangements to provide appropriate support for cases not requiring services from the Family Assessment and Safeguarding Team.

The local authority now meets the performance principles for performing well. The large majority of provision for children and young people is good or better overall and helps them learn and stay safe. The strengths and areas for further improvement are similar to last year. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and more schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

Strengths

- As in 2010, the large majority of early years and childcare providers are good or better. There are now no inadequate day care providers and the proportion of outstanding settings has increased to just over a fifth.
- The large majority of primary schools are good or better. One primary school was recently removed from special measures because of the improvements that it had made with good support from the local authority. The one school that still requires special measures is making satisfactory progress, again with the help of the local authority.
- Since last year, three secondary schools have become academies. When the most recent inspection grades for these schools are taken to account, the very large majority of secondary provision is good or better, which is an improvement on 2010. Like last year, there are no inadequate secondary schools.

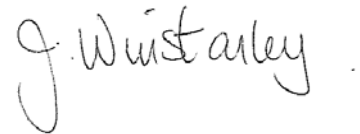
- As in 2010, the large majority of special education providers are good or better. Of the three pupil referral units, two are outstanding and the other is good. All four special schools maintained by the local authority are good or better at helping children and young people to stay safe.
- The local authority's fostering and adoption agencies are both good. The very large majority of the children's homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities are good or better. However, one of them is inadequate.
- For the last five years, the attainment of 11-year-olds has been in line with the averages nationally and for similar areas. Provisional figures for 2011 indicate that this continues to be the case.
- Over the last five years, the gap in attainment between 16-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed.
- As in the previous four years, the proportion of 17-year-olds who are continuing in education, work or training is higher than in similar areas.

Areas for further improvement

- The achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is considerably lower than the averages nationally and for similar areas. It has declined over the last four years, when elsewhere it has improved. The achievement gap between five-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed slightly over the last two years but remains wider than the averages nationally and for similar areas. However, the provisional data for 2011 indicate that the situation is improving.
- The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining GCSE grades A* to C in five subjects, including English and mathematics, is in line with averages nationally and for similar areas. However, the rate of improvement has been slower than that found across the country.
- Provision for learning beyond the age of 16 has declined since 2010 and is now too variable. One outstanding secondary sixth form has converted to academy status since last year. Even taking the most recent inspection grade for that provider into account, half the secondary schools sixth forms are only satisfactory. Of the two further education colleges inspected, one is good but the other is inadequate. Although the proportion of 19-year-olds who achieve the equivalent of two A level passes is in line with averages nationally and in similar areas, the rate of improvement over the last four years has been slower than elsewhere. The attainment gap between 19-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed in the last two years but widened over five years. It is currently wider than the averages nationally and for similar areas.

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" and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment