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Mr Anthony May
Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services
Nottinghamshire County Council
Children and Young People's Services
County Hall
West Bridgford
Nottingham
Nottinghamshire NG2 7QP

Dear Mr May

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.

Nottinghamshire County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Nottinghamshire County Council perform adequately. The improvement from performs poorly in 2010 reflects better performance in local safeguarding arrangements. In March 2010, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found inadequate arrangements for safeguarding. This judgement informed the performs poorly children's service assessment last year. In March 2011, Ofsted's annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found improving provision, with two strengths, many satisfactory areas of practice and five areas for development with no priority actions requiring urgent attention. In September 2011, a re-inspection of safeguarding arrangements identified services for ensuring children are safe are now adequate. There has been steady progress in improving outcomes and the capacity for further improvement is good. Senior managers and partner agencies now have a shared understanding of the effectiveness of safeguarding services with comprehensive plans in place to continue service improvement.

Strengths in other provision remain as last year with further improvement in some areas. The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall. The large majority of provision helps children and young people to stay safe and most support them effectively to enjoy their learning. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary school provision are taking place and some schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment. Areas for further improvement remain the same as last year.

Strengths

- The large majority of early years and childcare provision continues to be good or better. There is a slight increase in the proportion of good childcare in regulated settings but unlike last year there is some inadequate provision. During the year, 16 children's centres were inspected for the first time. Almost all are good and four are outstanding.
- For children under five, most early years provision in nursery and primary schools is effective with further improvement in the last year. More provision is good or better than in similar areas and the national average. With continuing improvement in the proportion of five-year-olds reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, achievement is in line with both similar areas and the national average.

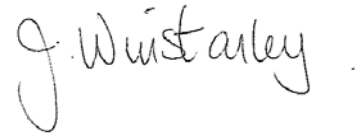
- Almost three-quarters of primary schools perform well with slightly more being good than last year and a higher proportion being good or outstanding than found in similar areas. Standards continue to rise with a large majority of children making the expected progress between seven and 11 years, and the proportion achieving Level 4 in both English and mathematics increasing slightly in 2011.
- Local authority specialist provision is almost all at least good, including all of the 11 special schools and most special sixth form provision. The number of independent special schools in Nottinghamshire has doubled to eight in the last year and provision is more variable, with only one that is good and two that are inadequate.
- For looked after children, the local authority's children's homes have improved. Three of the five are outstanding and two are now good. A very large majority of independently run children's homes commissioned by the local authority for children in their care are good or better.

Areas for further improvement

- Inspection shows no improvement in the number of good or better secondary schools and school sixth forms. Just over a half remain only satisfactory and only two of the 15 inspected in the last year improved from satisfactory to good. Positively, four secondary schools made sufficient improvement and are no longer inadequate, however, four others have been identified by Ofsted as having serious weaknesses.
- For 16-year-olds, standards in GCSE examinations continue to rise and provisional results for 2011 show further good improvement in the proportion of young people achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. However, the attainment of young people from low-income families is below the national average and the gap with their peers in Nottinghamshire is increasing.
- For education after 16 years, only just over a third of secondary school sixth forms and half of local colleges are good or better. However, the academy programme is driving further improvement with, for example, outstanding academies supporting those striving to get better. At the age of 19, young people gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications remain below similar areas and the proportion achieving level 3 qualifications is not improving at the same rate as found elsewhere. Education standards for those from low-income families are below the national average. The gap with their peers in Nottinghamshire is reducing gradually for the higher level 3 qualification but increasing for level 2 qualifications.

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, reading "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment