

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 7421 6666
Direct F 020 7421 5633
Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk



8 November 2011

Ms Yvette Stanley
Director of Children, Schools and Families
London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX

Dear Ms Stanley

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.

London Borough of Merton children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
--------------------------------	-------------------------

Children's services in the London Borough of Merton perform adequately as in 2010. The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and in helping children and young people stay safe. Areas of strength remain as last year with some improvement. Some progress has been made in addressing areas for development, including good progress in improving attainment at the age of 16, but the most recent overall effectiveness judgements of secondary schools continue to be lower than in similar areas and elsewhere.

An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection carried out in January 2011 found three strengths and six areas for development although none remained from the previous inspection or required immediate remedial action.

Strengths

- Early years and childcare provision has improved overall and the large majority is now good or better. Three children's centres have been inspected and judged good.
- For children under five the overall effectiveness of nurseries and primary schools has improved and the very large majority are good or better. The achievements of five-year olds in the Early Years Foundation Stage improved in 2010 and are just above those in similar parts of the country and much better than average nationally. Achievement also improved for very young children from families with low incomes and their level of development is the same as in similar areas and higher than average for England. The gap between the lowest achieving children of this age and others in the borough is also much narrower than elsewhere.
- The overall effectiveness of primary schools has improved and three-quarters are now good or better. Although one inadequate school has improved and is now adequate another requires special measures but is making good progress with effective support from the local authority. Standards achieved by 11-year-olds in national tests are in line with similar areas and the national average having improved well over the last five years.
- Secondary school sixth forms are mostly good or better with two outstanding and one satisfactory. By the age of 19 young people from families with low incomes are increasingly gaining level 2 or higher level qualifications and attainment is in line with the average for the same group in similar areas and higher than elsewhere. The borough has established four new sixth forms to broaden the local offer for young people aged 16 and over.

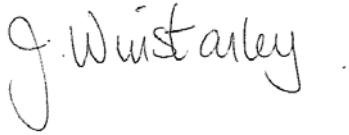
- Provision for special education has improved. Two of the three local authority special schools are outstanding and the third is now good as is the pupil referral unit. Local provision has been broadened through the establishment of new secondary provision in one of the two outstanding special schools and a sixth form in the other. For looked after children, the local authority fostering agency and children's home are good. Where the local authority commissions services for looked after children the very large majority of placements are with good or better fostering or adoption agencies or in good or better children's homes.

Areas for further improvement

- The overall effectiveness of secondary schools continues to be a significant weakness with only three of the eight good or better although none are now inadequate. One academy has improved and is now satisfactory but another school inspected since the last assessment has not improved and continues to be satisfactory. Persistent absence from secondary schools has reduced but continues to be much higher than in similar areas.
- Although the overall effectiveness of childminder settings has improved and is in line with the national average a third of settings are only satisfactory.
- Standards achieved by 16- and 19-year-olds at level 2 and level 3 are improving rapidly but they continue to be significantly below the average for similar areas, although in line with the averages for the country overall. At the age of 16, young people from families with low incomes also do not do as well as in similar areas and are not catching up with their peers in the borough. Standards achieved by 16-year-olds with special educational needs following the national curriculum are improving but likewise remain below the average for similar areas and the country overall.
- While work to reduce the high work loads of social workers and effective partnership working are strengths, the unannounced inspection of contract, referral and assessment arrangements identified the need to improve social workers' supervision as well as management oversight of their work.
- The recent report on youth offending work in Merton found two of the three key areas reported on to require substantial improvement.

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