

8 November 2011

Mr John Gilbert  
Group Director of Children's Services  
Swindon Borough Council  
Sanford House  
Sanford Street  
Swindon  
Wiltshire SN1 1QH

Dear Mr Gilbert

## 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.

## Swindon Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Swindon Borough Council perform well. This good performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and the very large majority of provision helps children and young people stay safe and enjoy learning. The strengths and areas for development remain largely the same as last year. All provision is now at least satisfactory and the proportion that is good or better has increased in some areas. Although young people's achievement at the age of 16 and 19 is improving, it remains persistently below the average for similar areas. Two outstanding schools have converted to academies in the last year and so their most recent inspection grades have been taken into account in making this assessment.

In 2010, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children judged both these areas to be good. Capacity to improve safeguarding is outstanding. In 2011, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found a number of strengths and areas for development, as well as many areas that meet requirements. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. All the areas for development identified at the first unannounced inspection, in 2010, have been tackled successfully.

### Strengths

- The large majority of day-care providers and the very large majority of provision for children under five in nurseries and primary schools are good or better. Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage remain in line with similar areas and the national average, despite no overall improvement since 2007.
- Three-quarters of primary schools are good or outstanding and the remainder are satisfactory. Standards at Key Stage 2 are in line with similar areas and the national average. Provisional results for 2011 show that improvement is keeping pace with the national trend over the last five years.
- Eight of the 10 secondary schools are now good or better and the other two are satisfactory. Standards at Key Stage 4 have improved well over the last three years. Provisional results for 2011 show that improvement has been maintained.
- Good support from the local authority has enabled the pupil referral unit and the inadequate special school to build capacity and improve their overall effectiveness to satisfactory. Four of the six special schools are now good and the other two are satisfactory.

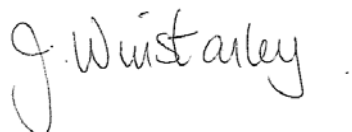
- The large majority of post-16 education provision is good or better. The rate of improvement of level 2 qualifications is much better than the average elsewhere and the gap in performance with similar areas is closing. The attainment gap between young people from low-income backgrounds and the majority at the age of 19 in Swindon has narrowed over the last two years.
- Services for looked after children are good overall with good capacity to improve. Health, well-being and education outcomes for children and young people in care or leaving care are good and work with partners is outstanding. The local authority adoption service is outstanding and the fostering service is good. There are no children's homes in Swindon. The very large majority of provision commissioned in children's homes elsewhere and most of the independent fostering and adoption agencies used by the local authority are good or outstanding.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Achievement at the age of 16 and 19 is consistently below the average for similar areas. A-level results are not improving as fast as the national trend over the last four years. The local authority has clear priorities to improve outcomes for young people, including reducing the numbers that are not in education, training or work, but the strategies it has put in place have yet to have a full impact.
- The recent inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified a number of areas for development. These include delays in completing assessments, other than child protection assessments, and weakness in assessing risk and protective factors for teenagers.
- Over one third of childminding provision is only satisfactory, as it was in 2010, and this is not as good overall as the quality of provision found in similar areas or nationally. The children's centre that has been inspected is only 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 black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment