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Ms Debbie Jones
Executive Director, Children and Young People's Services
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Dear Ms Jones

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 Lambeth children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Lambeth perform well. This good performance has been maintained since 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions are good or better and help children and young people to stay safe and enjoy their learning. Progress has been made in the areas for development identified in last year's assessment; latest data show teenage pregnancy rates continue to fall and there has been a reduction in childhood obesity bringing performance into line with similar areas. As elsewhere, changes have taken place to secondary school provision; some schools are now academies and previous inspection judgements have been taken into account in this assessment.

Ofsted's joint area review of January 2009 judged safeguarding and services for looked after children as good. The October 2010 unannounced inspection of children's social care contact, referral and assessment arrangements found several strengths, many areas of satisfactory practice and two areas for further development, with no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- Of the four children's centres that have been inspected in the last year, one is outstanding and three are good. The effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard children is a common strength in these centres.
- The very large majority of nursery school and Early Years Foundation Stage provision in primary schools is good or better, as it was in 2010. Over the last four years the rate of improvement in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at age five has been much better than found elsewhere, and performance is now in line with the national average and slightly better than in similar areas. Around one third of these children are from low-income families and, of these, the proportion achieving a good level of development is significantly higher than the national average. The achievement gap between this group of children and their peers in Lambeth shows a narrowing trend and further improvement in 2010.
- The large majority of primary schools and secondary provision across the borough are good or better. No schools are currently in an Ofsted category of concern. Secondary sixth form provision is good overall. In 2010 educational outcomes at ages 11 and 16 and by age 19 were broadly in line with similar areas and national averages. Provisional test and examination results for 11- and 16-year-olds show further improvement in 2011.

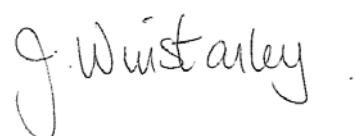
- The attainment of the high numbers of 16-year-olds from low-income backgrounds has improved year on year since 2007 and in 2010 was significantly above the national average. The achievement gap between this group of young people and their peers in Lambeth has narrowed well over the same period and is one of the smallest in the country.
- Provision for children and young people with additional needs is at least good in four out of the five local authority special schools across the borough. An Ofsted monitoring visit shows that the one satisfactory special school is making good progress towards improvement.
- Changes in the organisation of alternative provision for pupils excluded, or at risk of exclusion, from mainstream school have taken place. Currently one pupil referral unit is good and the other satisfactory; this provision is making good progress with improvements.
- As last year, the local authority's adoption and fostering agencies are both good.

Areas for further improvement

- The quality of registered early years and childcare provision has improved since last year. The majority is now good or better and there is no inadequate registered day-care provision and fewer inadequate registered childminders. However, there continues to be scope for further improvement, especially in the quality of registered childminding in the borough, as the proportion of good or better providers is below that found in similar areas and the national average.
- White young people aged 16, accounting for about a quarter of the 2010 GCSE cohort, did not achieve as well as their peers in the borough and the proportion of this group achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics was significantly below similar areas and the national average.

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