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Ms Gill Rollings
Executive Director, Children, Families and Learning
Middlesbrough Borough Council
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Dear Ms Rollings

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.

Middlesbrough Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Middlesbrough Borough Council perform adequately. This is the same as in 2010. Despite small improvements in education, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children, in June 2011, judged services to be adequate overall. This inspection judged capacity to improve safeguarding to be good. However, while there are a few areas of strength in safeguarding provision, there are other significant areas where improvement is required.

The large majority of provision for children and young people is good or better and helps children to stay safe and enjoy their learning. The local authority has provided good quality support to the inadequate pupil referral unit and the secondary school and they are no longer in an Ofsted category of concern.

Strengths

- Early years and childcare provision is mostly good. The children's centres inspected provide good support for children and families. The levels of development for the youngest children, as measured in the Early Years Foundation Stage, match similar areas. Outcomes for children from low-income families are also improving and the gap between them and the majority of children in Middlesbrough matches that in similar areas.
- The very good performance of nursery and primary schools has been maintained. The only primary school with serious weaknesses is making satisfactory progress. Results at the age of 11 are in line with similar areas although provisional results for 2011 show a drop.
- The strengths in post-16 provision have been consolidated and the only inadequate college closed in July 2011. Young people now have access to mostly good or outstanding provision for learning. The two general further education and tertiary colleges, the two school sixth forms and the two special school sixth forms remain at least good as they were in 2010. Level 2 and level 3 outcomes at the age of 19 have improved and match the trend in similar areas, although they are well below the national average. The proportion of 19-year-olds from low-income backgrounds attaining a level 2 qualification is above similar areas. It matches similar areas at level 3.
- For looked after children, adoption and fostering services, including those which are privately run, are consistently good. Four children's homes are good and one is adequate. The inspection of services for looked after children reported that the education achievement of these young people was improving and that, at the age of 16, the numbers achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics exceeded the national

figure. The inspection also reported that post-16 outcomes for young people in or leaving care were outstanding. Good additional support ensures that the very large majority of care leavers are engaged in some form of education, training or work.

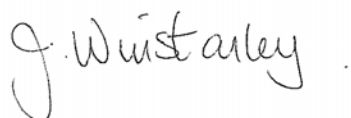
- At Key Stage 4, results for young people from low-income families and from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds match those for their peers in similar areas and, in 2010, young people of Asian heritage did particularly well. Their results at GCSE were above those of the majority of young people in Middlesbrough.

Areas for further improvement

- The full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found that the local authority had taken swift action to tackle areas for development identified in the October 2010 unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection. However, a number of areas for improvement remain. Deprivation, high levels of domestic violence and alcohol misuse present particular challenges. Early intervention and preventative services are insufficiently effective. Referrals to the looked after children's service and social work caseloads are very high and reduce the capacity of services to improve outcomes further.
- As elsewhere, secondary school provision is changing in Middlesbrough and there are now three academies and two local authority schools. Despite the improvement of one local authority secondary school and one pupil referral unit from inadequate to satisfactory, provision remains mostly satisfactory. This includes two special schools, one academy and two pupil referral units.
- Persistent absence from school remains a key concern and is above similar areas.
- Key Stage 4 results have improved over the past four years but from a very low base. They remain below the average of similar areas and well below the national average. Provisional GCSE results for 2011 show a significant drop in the proportion of young people attaining five good GCSE including English and mathematics.

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