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Mrs Lorraine Butcher
Director of Children's Services
Cheshire East Council
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Dear Mrs Butcher

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.

Cheshire East Council children's services assessment 2011

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs well (3) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|

Children's services in Cheshire East Council perform well. The good performance in 2010 has been sustained in 2011. The large majority of settings and institutions are good or better and the very large majority of provision helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. One primary school and four secondary schools, all judged to be good or outstanding in their last inspections, have become academies during the year. These inspection judgements have been taken into account in the 2011 assessment. There is very little inadequate provision, with one primary school in an Ofsted category of concern. Main strengths and areas for further development remain similar to those identified in 2010.

A recent full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children judged both services to be adequate with adequate capacity to improve. Strong leadership is provided by the local authority and its partners ensuring that safeguarding services are increasingly effective. The report identified a number of areas for improvement related to safeguarding arrangements.

Strengths

- The large majority of registered day-care settings and childminding providers are judged good or better and this has been sustained since last year.
- A high proportion of nursery and primary schools are judged good or outstanding. The majority of very young children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve a good level of development, in line with similar areas and the national average. There is one primary school in special measures and Ofsted monitoring letters show the local authority is providing good challenge and support to help the school address the identified weaknesses.
- Strong academic performance continues for most children and young people as they move through the education system. Standards in national tests for 11-year-olds, including children who are looked after by the local authority, have risen over the last three years, and in 2010 were above the average for similar areas and nationally. Provisional data for 2011 show a further increase in performance. The large majority of secondary schools are judged good or outstanding. Levels of achievement for 16-year-olds gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics continue to rise, with students performing better than their peers elsewhere. Of the four secondary schools inspected in 2011, three schools improved; two from good to outstanding and a third, which had been in an Ofsted category of concern, was judged to be satisfactory. The fourth, previously good, was judged to be satisfactory.

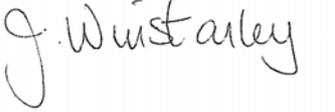
- For young people staying on in education or training, the large majority of provision is good or outstanding. This performance has been maintained since last year and is better than performance in similar areas and nationally. A minority of secondary sixth forms, four out of 13 settings, are satisfactory. More young people are now achieving the equivalent of five good GCSEs by the age of 19 years than in similar areas and nationally. The gap in achievement between all young people and those from low-income families, although still wider than elsewhere, has narrowed consistently over the last five years.
- The overall effectiveness of special school provision continues to be strong. Four local authority maintained special schools, three with sixth forms, are judged good or outstanding and two of the three independent special schools in the area are also of a good or better standard.
- The large majority of services for looked after children are good including those which have been commissioned by the local authority. There is no inadequate provision. Private fostering and adoption arrangements are outstanding. A recent inspection of the local authority adoption service judged overall effectiveness to be good, while the fostering agency is satisfactory.

Areas for further improvement

- Children and young people from low-income families do not achieve as well as others in Cheshire East. Very young children do less well than those of the same age in similar areas and nationally. However, this area has been a priority for the local authority and recent provisional data show significant improvement in achievement in 2011 for all five-year-olds, including those from low-income families, and that the gap has narrowed. At the age of 16, the gap between those from low-income families and others of the same age has not closed over the last two years and is still wider than elsewhere. Fewer 16-year-olds with special educational needs do as well as their peers in similar areas or nationally. The proportion of 19-year-olds from low-income families who achieve higher level 3 qualifications is below that in both similar areas and nationally and the gap with their peers in Cheshire East and elsewhere has widened substantially in the last three years.
- As last year a number of secondary schools, some with sixth forms, are satisfactory. Persistent absence from secondary schools although decreasing is still higher than in similar areas.
- Although adequate overall, the recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services identified a number of key areas as requiring immediate action including: improved prompt notification of outcomes of referrals to referring agencies; improved recording of visits to children and of the views and feelings of children and their families; and that equality and diversity issues are routinely assessed, recorded and considered in case planning and service delivery.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment