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Ms Sheila Smith
Director of Children and Young People's Services
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Dear Ms Smith

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.

North Somerset Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in North Somerset Council perform excellently as in 2010. The very large majority of settings, services and institutions are good or better and help children and young people to stay safe and enjoy their learning. There has been some progress in the one area for further development identified in last year's assessment: all three special schools in the area have been inspected over the last year; one continues to be outstanding, one has improved to good and the other remains satisfactory. As elsewhere, some secondary schools have become academies and the previous inspection grades for these schools have been taken into account in this assessment.

The most recent inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection took place in March 2011. The inspection identified two areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements with two areas for development. The areas for development identified at the previous inspection in June 2010 have been addressed.

Strengths

- There has been an improvement in the quality of nursery schools and Early Years Foundation Stage provision in primary schools and the very large majority are now good or better. Since the last assessment the proportion of five-year-olds achieving a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year at school has improved and is better than found elsewhere. Performance has improved rapidly since 2007.
- The overall quality of registered early years and childcare remains good as it was last year, although this proportion has slipped and there is now slightly more satisfactory provision.
- The large majority of primary schools are still at least good, although slightly more are now satisfactory than last year. In 2010, test results for 11-year-olds were broadly in line with similar areas and the national average. However, the latest 2011 provisional data show an improvement with performance rising above the national average.
- Young people have access to post-16 provision that is of very good quality, as it was last year. All secondary school sixth form provision is at least good and the local college is also good. The numbers of young people gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 in the area show year on year improvement and performance is better than in similar areas and nationally.

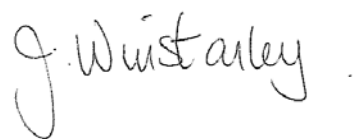
- There are now no inadequate schools in the local authority area. The one primary school that was in an Ofsted category of concern last year is now satisfactory with good capacity for further improvement. This school received good support from the local authority.
- Specialist provision for children and young people with additional needs is good overall. Two of the three local authority maintained special schools are now at least good. A common feature of the special schools in the area is the strong work that takes place with partners to promote the learning and well-being of those attending. All four pupil referral units are at least good, as they were last year. Following inspection in May 2011 the local authority's adoption agency is now outstanding and the fostering agency remains outstanding, as it was last year.
- The local authority has no children's homes of its own. The quality of the children's homes where the local authority does place children and young people is good or better in all cases.
- The very large majority of educational outcomes for all children and young people are at least in line with performance found in similar areas and nationally.

Areas for further improvement

- The overall quality of secondary school provision is satisfactory in 2011 whereas it was good in 2010. This means that the proportion of good or better schools in the area is now below that found in similar areas and nationally.
- At the age of five and 16 the attainment of children and young people from low-income families has improved, but is below the national average and the gap in achievement between them and their peers in North Somerset does not show a consistent trend of narrowing.
- The proportion of looked after young people aged 16 gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is below similar area and national averages.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment