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Ms Jane Porter
Acting Director of Children's Services
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
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Dear Ms Porter

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.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. The good performance in 2010 has been sustained and, in some areas, the quality of inspected provision has been improved further. The very large majority of settings, services and institutions continue to help children and young people learn well and stay safe. Areas of strength remain the same as last year.

The unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection carried out in March 2011 identified areas of practice that met requirements. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. The areas for development identified at the previous inspection of these arrangements, in July 2010, had been largely addressed.

Strengths

- For children under five, the very large majority of provision in early years and childcare settings continue to be good or outstanding as they were in 2010. Five of the six children's centres inspected are good and one is satisfactory. The quality of nurseries has improved further and more are now good or outstanding. Over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including for children from low-income backgrounds, have improved at a faster rate than nationally, although they are still slightly below the average for similar areas.
- Improving primary schools was an area for development identified in 2010. Good progress had been made and now over half are good or better. The primary schools in an Ofsted category of concern are making at least satisfactory progress. Ofsted monitoring visits to these schools show that support to bring about improvement has been effective.
- Specialist education provision, including all seven special schools, the special school sixth form, the independent specialist college for young people with complex needs and the three pupil referral units, are good or better as they were last year.
- The large majority of secondary schools are good or outstanding. One secondary school in an Ofsted category of concern made good progress and was judged satisfactory when re-inspected this year. However, a different secondary school is now inadequate. One outstanding school has recently become an academy. Over the past four years, results for 16-year-olds have improved at a faster rate than nationally. The proportion of young people achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics matches similar areas and the national average. Results for young people from low-income families are also rising and are above those of their counterparts in similar areas.

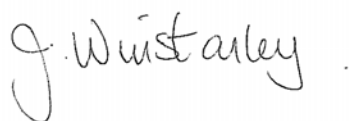
- As in 2010, provision for learning post-16 remains good or better overall. The sixth form college is outstanding. One school sixth form is good but the other two are only satisfactory. The proportion of 19-year-olds obtaining level 2 or level 3 qualifications match similar local authorities and the national average. A higher proportion of 19-year-olds from low-income backgrounds than in similar areas achieve these qualifications. The gap in attainment at level 2 between them and the majority of young people of the same age in Dudley is closing, although not so significantly at level 3.
- The good quality of the local authority children's homes has been maintained and three of the six are outstanding. As in the previous assessment, the local authority adoption agency is good and the fostering agency is satisfactory.
- The youth offending service requires only minimal improvement to its safeguarding work and in preventing re-offending by young people and moderate improvement in reducing the risk of harm.

Areas for further improvement

- In March 2011, the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection reported that one area for development identified in 2010 had yet to be fully addressed and a number of new areas for development were identified this year.
- The quality of privately-run provision for looked after children and young people used by the local authority is not as good as it was in 2010. One private fostering and adoption agency is outstanding but one is now inadequate. Only one of the six privately run children's homes is good. Four are satisfactory and one is inadequate.
- A minority of primary schools are only satisfactory. There were no published Key Stage 2 results in 2010 and provisional results for 2011 show that they remain as they were in 2009 and, overall, not improved substantially.

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