

9 December 2010

Ms Bronwen Lacey  
Director of Children's Services  
Plymouth City Council  
Windsor House, Tavistock Road  
Plymouth PL6 5UF

Dear Ms Lacey

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes 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 data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against 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 2009, 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.

## Plymouth City Council children's services assessment 2010

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

Children's services in Plymouth City Council perform well. In 2009, a transitional year, they were assessed as performing adequately. However, in 2010 there is enough good provision to meet the minimum requirements for this grade.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Education and day care provision for very young children are good, as are the area's secondary schools. However, primary schools and special schools are only adequate and pupil referral units are poor. School sixth forms are adequate and, whilst one of the two general further education colleges is good, the other is only satisfactory. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are good.

Provision for safeguarding and for children in care is good overall. The local authority takes outstanding measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes almost all of the main measures of educational attainment. Test and examination results up to the age of 16 are broadly in line with the average in similar areas and the rates of improvement over recent years has been comparable to national figures, albeit with a significant recent dip at the age of 11. By the age of 19 the proportion of young people achieving qualifications equal to five good GCSEs is significantly better than the similar area average, but for those achieving higher qualifications equal to two good A levels it is significantly worse. Children and young people from low-income families do about as well as the average for this group in similar areas. However, the achievement in the national tests of those with special educational needs is much better.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of pupil referral units.
- Improve the proportion of young people achieving a qualification equivalent to two good A levels by the age of 19.

### Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. The proportion of children who are seriously overweight at the age of five and 11 is very close to the average in similar areas. In both cases, however, the figure has gone up significantly over the last couple of years and comparisons with the national averages have worsened. This is despite the proportion of children and young people regularly taking part in sport being well above the average nationally. The number of young women aged under 18 who

become pregnant is very close to the average in similar areas and the reduction over the last decade has been modest, similar to the national picture. The rate of screening for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted disease, is well below the national average.

Provision for safeguarding is much improved over recent years and is now good overall. The very large majority of individual services like schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe and collaborative working between all the main agencies is good. Good progress has been made in identifying problems early and providing support before they become very serious. The local authority's measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements are outstanding. Provision for young people in care is also good overall, with a particularly strong emphasis on improving educational attainment. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are good. However, there has been a recent increase in the number of young people in care having frequent changes in their care placement and this is now well above the national average. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has fluctuated considerably from year-to-year but the number of serious injuries to children more generally which require hospital admission has increased. The number of children and young people who say they have been bullied is higher than the average in similar areas.

The overall quality of both day care provision for very young children and secondary schools is good and significantly better than the national average. Nursery education is also good. Primary schools are adequate and the overall quality is significantly below the national average. However, secondary schools are good and much better than nationally. All three of the pupil referral units are only satisfactory, which is a poor picture overall. Test and examination results up to the age of 16 are broadly in line with the average in similar areas and the rate of improvement over recent years has been comparable to nationally, albeit with a significant recent dip at the age of 11. The number of primary schools failing to meet minimum requirements for pupil attainment increased last year, although there had been a large reduction in the year before. The number of secondary schools failing to meet such requirements has gone down substantially and only one remains. Attendance in secondary schools is much better than average, as is behaviour, which is very good overall. At the age of 11 children and young people from low-income families achieve significantly better than the average for this group in similar areas. Good progress has been made in improving their performance at this age and the gap between them and other children has reduced. At the age of 16 their performance is much more in line with the average elsewhere and there has been only a small narrowing of the gap. The achievement in national tests of young people with special educational needs is much better than the average for this group elsewhere, both at the age of 11 and 16. However, the overall quality of special schools is only adequate and below the national average. Special schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests.

The proportion of young people involved in organised group activities outside school is close to the average in similar areas, as is the number who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently. Re-offending by young people is lower than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services to seek children and young people's views and involve them in decision-making.

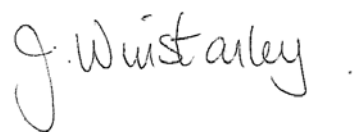
Most services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. The overall quality of school sixth forms is good, albeit just below the national average. However, whilst one of the two further education colleges is good, the other, and by far the larger, is only satisfactory. The number of young people staying on in education or training after they reach school leaving age and the number aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training are both broadly in line with the averages in similar areas. By the age of 19 the proportion of young people achieving qualifications equal to five good GCSEs is significantly better than the similar area average, but for those achieving qualifications equal to two good A levels it is significantly worse. The rate of improvement over recent years has been in line with that nationally for the former measure but for the latter significantly worse. Young people from low-income families do much better than the same group elsewhere on the five GCSE measure, but much less well in terms of the higher qualification.

### **Prospects for improvement**

The current quality of provision for safeguarding and for children in care owes much to the outstanding leadership at senior level, both from politicians and managers. There has been a significant improvement in provision, including partnership working, at all levels. The improvements made include rapid and effective action to respond to the recommendations of the 2009 inspection of front-line child protection services. There are strong performance management processes well suited to ensuring that the improvements made are sustained. The recent track record of improvement otherwise is a mixed one. The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs, not least because of their efforts in obtaining the views of young people themselves and their good partnership working with the voluntary sector. This knowledge is reflected in the improvement priorities set. Considerable work has gone into restructuring services to improve collaborative working and to ensure that they intervene earlier and more effectively where problems are developing. This is now beginning to bear fruit.

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