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Ms Bronwen Lacey
Director of Children's Services
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Children's Services
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Dear Ms Lacey

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.

Plymouth City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Plymouth City Council perform excellently. This marks a notable improvement on the good performance in 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding and provision of high quality helps children and young people learn well and stay safe. The local authority has built effectively on its well-established strengths. Inspection grades for primary and secondary schools, as well as the adoption service, have improved. In other respects, the strengths and areas for development have not changed significantly in the last year. A number of schools have now become academies. Most of these schools were judged to be good or better at their last inspection and these judgements have been taken into account in making this assessment.

An announced inspection, in 2010, judged safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children to be good with some features, for example strategic leadership, service management and partnership work, that are outstanding. A more recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found three strengths, many satisfactory aspects and a number of areas for development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention.

Strengths

- The large majority of childminding and childcare providers remain good or better. Six of the eight children's centres that have been inspected are good or outstanding and the other two are satisfactory.
- For children under five, the very large majority of nursery schools and Early Years Foundation Stage provision in primary schools are good or outstanding. Levels of development achieved by five-year-olds are in line with similar areas and the national average, and have improved well over the last four years. The attainment gap between children from low-income families and all five-year-olds locally is closing.
- The proportion of primary schools that are good or better has increased since 2010 and the large majority are now good or outstanding. Standards at Key Stage 2 are in line with the average elsewhere, with children making better than average progress in mathematics than their peers in similar areas. However, provisional Key Stage 2 results indicate a decline in 2011.
- As in 2010, the large majority of secondary schools are good or better. The two schools inspected since the last assessment improved from good to outstanding. Levels of persistent school absence are consistently below the average for similar areas. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is in line with the average for similar areas and found nationally and, over the last four years, has improved at a faster rate than elsewhere. Young people from

low-income backgrounds and those with special educational needs do better than the average for their peers elsewhere, with results that are improving year on year at a faster pace.

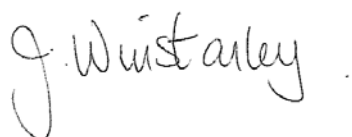
- For young people staying on in education or training, the large majority of provision in school sixth forms is good or better. Achievement of level 2 qualifications by the age of 19 is in line with similar areas and the national average. The attainment gap at this level, between young people from low-income backgrounds and the majority of the same age in Plymouth, is closing.
- Services for looked after children are good, with good capacity to improve. Children and young people's involvement in decisions that affect their lives and the services they use is outstanding. Outcomes in all other respects, including health and education, are good. The local authority currently commissions places in two children's homes. One is outstanding and the other is good. All fostering and adoption services are good or better. The local authority adoption service improved from good to outstanding during the year.

Areas for further improvement

- At the age of 19, achievement at level 3, an area for development in 2010, remains below the average for similar areas. The gap between young people from low-income backgrounds and the majority at this level is wider than average and increasing.
- The quality of specialist education provision remains mixed. While none is inadequate and the three residential schools are good or better, more than half of the local authority special schools, both special school sixth forms and the pupil referral unit are only satisfactory. Action has been taken to reorganise and improve provision in the pupil referral unit, but the new arrangements have not been inspected since the changes took place.

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