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Bradley Simmons HMI
Regional Director, South West

Mr Patrick Flaherty
The Chief Executive
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton
TA1 4DY

Dear Mr Flaherty

Somerset local authority multi-remit focused inspection outcomes

I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of the 39 inspections in the multi-remit focused inspection completed between 8 September and 3 October 2014. This inspection was prompted by an initial review of all inspected provision for children and young people in Somerset. The review revealed that many of the most vulnerable children and families in the local authority area were attending provision that was less than good.

The focused inspection has given Ofsted an up-to-date picture of the provision for vulnerable children and families across Somerset and of your part in improving it.

Summary of inspection judgements

Somerset local authority is not providing services of a good enough standard for its most vulnerable children, young people and families. Too many of the settings inspected were judged inadequate.

- Overall, one third of the 39 settings inspected were judged as requiring improvement or inadequate.
- Six settings were judged inadequate.
- No maintained schools were judged inadequate, but a fifth of schools inspected require improvement.

Summary of inspection activity

The multi-remit inspection covered a range of different settings.¹ All were due for inspection in the autumn term 2014, but were brought into the four-week window of the multi-remit focused inspection.

During the inspections, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), social care regulatory inspectors and additional inspectors gathered information on local authority support to improve the educational attainment of pupils and students on free school meals, looked-after children and the most able. This included outcomes for children and young people in children's homes and children and families attending children's centres.

Inspectors also asked leaders in each setting three additional questions:

1. How well does the local authority know your setting, your performance and the standards achieved by your looked-after children/care leavers, those on free school meals and the most able?
2. What measures are in place to support and challenge your setting? How do these meet the needs of your looked-after children/care leavers, children and young people on free school meals and the most able children and young people?
3. What is the impact of the local authority support and challenge over time to help your setting to improve?

Inspection outcomes

The outcomes of all inspections are included in Annex A.

Four **children's homes** were inspected.

- SC434174 and SC408867 were judged to be inadequate.
- SC029950 and SC030439, which provide care and accommodation for children with complex needs, were judged as adequate overall.
- Leadership and management arrangements at SC030439 were inadequate.

Of the 19 **primary schools** inspected:

- Seven improved by a grade, two declined and 10 remained the same.
- Two schools judged to require improvement in September 2012 received the same grade during the focused inspection.
- Four of the improved schools moved from good to outstanding.
- Three improved from requires improvement to good.
- The two that declined moved from good to requiring improvement.

¹ Nineteen primary schools, four secondary schools, one special school, two independent residential special schools, three pupil referral units, one further education college, four children's homes, two children's centre groups and three nurseries.

Of the four **secondary schools** inspected, all four were previously judged as requires improvement in the autumn of 2012 or spring 2013. Three improved from requires improvement to good and one remained the same.

All three **pupil referral units** were judged as good for overall effectiveness. These had recently been merged from nine smaller units. The previous overall effectiveness grades of the nine pupil referral units ranged from satisfactory to outstanding.

The **special school** and one **residential special school** were judged as good, as in their previous inspections. The other residential special school was judged inadequate. The inadequate school had declined from outstanding at its last inspection in February 2014.

The **further education college** improved from good to outstanding.

Both **children's centre groups** were judged inadequate.

- Each group is made up of five stand-alone children's centres.
- Both groups had three stand-alone centres that had been inspected previously.
- In one group all three centres were judged as satisfactory at their previous inspection.
- The other group had two centres that were satisfactory and one good.

Of the three **nurseries**

- Two were judged good and one was found to be inadequate.
- All three settings were attached to the groups of children's centres inspected as part of the focused inspection.
- One nursery improved from satisfactory to good.
- The other good setting declined from outstanding.
- The inadequate nursery declined from outstanding.

Strengths

- The majority of children and young people attending the **mainstream primary and secondary schools** inspected do well in all key stages.
- In three of the secondary schools that improved from requires improvement to good, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those in care are now making improved progress. As a result, the gaps between the attainment and progress of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and others have narrowed. In the primary schools that improved, the gaps between the attainment and progress of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and others have also narrowed.
- A feature of the improving schools in both primary and secondary sectors is the improving achievement of more able pupils. School-to-school support

through the Local and National Leaders in Education initiative coordinated by the Local Authority has been successful in supporting some primary schools to get to good.

- In the **further education college** inspected, the majority of young people whose starting points were low catch up with their peers because they receive particularly good support and their progress is monitored closely. This leads them to further courses, apprenticeships, higher education and employment.
- Special educational needs coordinators at schools and colleges often have well-established and strong links with the local authority. They share information about children and young people at risk of under-achievement due to personal and social circumstances.
- Where local authority representatives are part of the management or governing bodies, such as in the pupil referral units, they provide strong support for, and challenge to, school leaders through timely and helpful information and professional discussion.
- Care staff working in **homes for children and young people** with complex needs very effectively support and develop their residents' social and personal skills to maximise their experiences in daily life.

Areas for improvement

- In the **children's homes**, the local authority has failed to take timely action to ensure that the service improves. It does not provide children and young people with a consistently good quality of care. Over time, the local authority has failed to remedy major weaknesses in leadership and management in two of the homes inspected. More recently, before the inspections, the local authority had made the decision to close both of the children's homes.
- Arrangements to ensure the safety and welfare of the most vulnerable children and families attending **children's centres** and one **nursery** are inadequate. The local authority does not support children's centres and other settings that face safeguarding concerns or have a need for early help.
- The majority of headteachers and governors of **schools** inspected report that the local authority provides insufficient support and advice on safeguarding and child protection concerns. The local authority has been slow to act on improving this service.
- In the **special schools** and those with **residential provision in the independent sector**, local authority representatives do not comply with their duty to attend pupils' annual reviews. As a result, a full and comprehensive view of the pupil is not available to the local authority to help plan support as pupils' needs change.

- The local authority has been slow to help resolve the problems associated with pupil premium funds for children eligible for free school meals in **special schools**. Special school headteachers have difficulty in disaggregating funding from mainstream provision due to pupils' registration in both the mainstream setting and the special school (dual registration). As a result, special schools do not have access to the additional funding to offer further support to these children.
- The local authority has insufficient knowledge of **schools'** strengths and weaknesses to make timely and supportive interventions. The majority of headteachers and governors say that the local authority does not know their schools and their pupils well enough. For example, many of the primary school headteachers and governors report that the local authority's knowledge of the school is solely through desk-based data analysis and not through visits and direct discussions with school leaders.
- The Somerset Challenge, a practitioner-led collaborative partnership of **secondary schools** supported by Somerset County Council, although welcomed by schools, has been too slow to show impact. For example, half of the secondary schools inspected report that the local authority offered no support or guidance after the schools were judged to require improvement at their previous inspection.
- In the **primary schools** that were judged to require improvement, children eligible for free school meals or who are looked after are not supported well enough and the gap between their achievement and their peers is not narrowing.
- Very young children attending **nursery**, and the two **children's centre groups** inspected, do not reach their expected levels of development on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage. The local authority has given insufficient support and challenge to these settings.

Recommendations

The local authority should:

- improve the consistency and quality of care that local authority children's homes provide to children and young people through clearer strategic direction and management oversight
- secure the arrangements for the safety and welfare of all children by:
 - providing timely intervention and effective support for settings where there are safeguarding concerns and

- increasing support and advice on safeguarding and child protection for headteachers
- remedy problems arising from the dual registration of pupils attending the pupil referral units and special schools, to ensure they receive their allocation of the pupil premium to support eligible pupils
- improve communication between the local authority and headteachers to ensure that it has sufficient knowledge and understanding of schools' strengths and weaknesses to provide specific support as necessary
- raise young children's levels of development on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage by improving support and challenge to early years settings, including children's centres.

I hope these findings are useful to you and help you to continue to improve outcomes for all children and young people in Somerset.

Please pass my thanks to all those who made time to talk to Her Majesty's Inspectors, social care regulatory inspectors, additional inspectors and early years inspectors during the period of the multi-remit focused inspection.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bradley Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Bradley Simmons HMI
Regional Director, South West

Annex A

Inspection outcomes

	Institution name	Phase	Inspection dates	Date previously inspected	Previous OE grade	Current OE grade
1	Dunster First School	PRI	16–17 Sept	19/05/10	2	2
2	Vallis First School	PRI	16–17 Sept	10/11/10	2	2
3	Middlezoy Primary School	PRI	23–24 Sept	04/07/11	2	2
4	North Newton Community Primary School	PRI	09–10 Sept	26/05/10	2	2
5	Othery Village School	PRI	23–24 Sept	21/11/12	3	2
6	Milford Junior School	PRI	09–10 Sept	18/09/12	3	3
7	Ilchester Community School	PRI	10–11 Sept	03/02/10	2	3
8	Beckington Church of England First School	PRI	09–10 Sept	03/03/10	2	1
9	All Saints Church of England Primary School	PRI	11–12 Sept	13/09/12	3	3
10	Hinton St George Church of England School	PRI	16–17 Sept	05/05/10	2	2
11	Mells Church of England First School	PRI	17–18 Sept	24/02/10	2	3
12	Oakhill Church of England Primary School	PRI	10–11 Sept	26/01/10	2	2
13	St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School	PRI	11–12 Sept	29/06/10	2	2
14	Cannington Church of England Primary School	PRI	17–18 Sept	31/01/13	2	2
15	Spaxton Church of England Primary School	PRI	17–18 Sept	16/06/10	2	1
16	North Curry Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	PRI	16–17 Sept	17/03/10	2	1
17	Haselbury Plucknett Church of England First School	PRI	10–11 Sept	03/03/10	2	2
18	Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School	PRI	09–10 Sept	25/01/10	2	1
19	Stoberry Park School	PRI	10–11 Sept	30/01/13	3	2
20	Chilton Trinity	SEC	11–12 Sept	06/12/12	3	2
21	Bucklers Mead Academy	SEC	16–17 Sept	09/10/12	3	2
22	St Dunstan's School	SEC	10–11 Sept	10/01/13	3	3
23	Westfield Academy	SEC	11–12 Sept	22/01/13	3	2
24	Critchill School	SEN	17–18 Sept	11/07/11	2	2
25	Mendip Partnership School	PRU	09–10 Sept	10/05/12	3	2
26	South Somerset Partnership School	PRU	09–10 Sept	04/02/10	1	2
27	The Bridge School Sedgemoor	PRU	17–18 Sept	04/10/11	2	2
28	Shapwick School	Res SEN	22–26 Sept	07/12/11	1	4
29	Mark College	Res SEN	23–25 Sept	02/03/11	2	2

30	Somerset – South Somerset	CC group	01–03 Oct	N/A	N/A	4
31	Somerset - Taunton	CC group	22–24 Sept	N/A	N/A	4
32	Chard Neighbourhood Nursery School/Schools Out	EYs	16 Sept	27/06/11	3	2
33	Circles	EYs	30 Sept	26/01/09	1	4
34	Creech St Michael Community Pre-school	EYs	11 Sept	09/06/09	1	2
35	SC434174	CH	11 Sept	27/11/13	N/A	4
36	SC408867	CH	09 Sept	29/01/14	N/A	4
37	SC029950	CH LDD	09 Sept	19/02/14	N/A	3
38	SC030439	CH LDD	11 Sept	10/03/14	N/A	3
39	Strode College	FE & S	23–26 Sept	01/10/08	2	1

Key

PRI	primary
SEC	secondary
SEN	special educational needs
PRU	pupil referral unit
RES	residential
CC	children’s centre
EY	early years
CH	children’s home
LDD	learning difficulties and/or disabilities
FE & S	further education and skills