

9 December 2010

Mr Nick Hudson
Director of Children and Young People's Services
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Progress House
Westwood Park Drive
Wigan WN3 4HH

Dear Mr Hudson

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.

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better.

The local authority's fostering and adoption agencies are good, as are most of the children's homes. The large majority of nursery and primary schools, and the very large majority of secondary and special schools, are good or better. Half of the provision in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges is no better than satisfactory, although inspectors found one of the colleges to be outstanding. Two of the three further education colleges inspected are good and the third is satisfactory. Inspections show that most childminder and childcare provision is good but too much of it is only satisfactory.

The most recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified no areas for priority action and highlighted particular strengths in partnership working.

National performance measures show that almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England and for similar areas. In national tests, 11-year-olds achieve as well as their peers elsewhere. The proportion of 16-year-olds who gain good GCSE passes in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, is in line with the average for similar areas. The gap between the achievement of most 11-year-olds and of those with special educational needs is closing. However, at secondary level, the gap between the performance of students who receive free school meals and others of the same age is widening. The same is true of the gap in performance between 19-year-olds from low-income families and others of that age.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the provision for childminding and childcare, so that more of it is good or better.
- Improve the performance of secondary students who receive free school meals.
- Increase the number of young people from low-income families who gain qualifications at the age of 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are generally very successful. The very large majority of schools and children's homes are very good at this, as is the local fostering agency. However, a smaller proportion of childminders are good or better in this respect and all the pupil referral units are satisfactory. Improvements include higher numbers of mothers breast-feeding their babies and more children and young people being satisfied with parks and play areas. There has been a slight increase in the number of children and young people taking part in physical activities and sports but the improvement has been less than elsewhere. Fewer primary school pupils take school lunches than in similar areas.

Schools are very good at keeping children and young people safe, as are the children's home and the local authority fostering and adoption agencies. Childminders and providers of childcare are only adequate in this respect. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services, conducted in October 2010, highlighted the good partnership working between a range of agencies. This is leading to timely and effective safeguarding of children living in families with domestic abuse; to a significant reduction in the number of referrals to children's services for family support; and to more effective targeting of social care resources. The most recent figures show that the local authority has been more successful than most others nationally in ensuring that child protection cases do not last for two or more years. There has been a fall in the number of children admitted to hospital with injuries and in the incidents of bullying. It is taking longer than in the past to arrange placements for adoption. The increase in the number of children in care is also putting pressure on placements, with the result that the number who have been with the same family for two or more years has fallen.

Primary, secondary and special schools are very good at helping children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. The same is true of the local authority's adoption and fostering agencies and the children's homes. Childminders and childcare providers are good at this but one sixth form college and the pupil referral units are only satisfactory. As in the previous four years, the achievement of three- to five-year-olds is higher than the average in similar areas. The very large majority of primary school children make the progress expected of them and, in national tests, 11-year-olds achieve as well their peers in similar local authorities. The number of 16-year-olds gaining good GCSE grades in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, has risen in line with similar areas. In the very large majority of secondary schools, behaviour is good or outstanding. Absence rates have halved in the last four years and secondary schools perform considerably better than the average in similar local authorities. The local authority provides good support to help schools improve. This is reflected in the speed with which two schools were brought out of special measures and the quality of advice being offered to the school with a notice to improve.

The large majority of the services inspected make good or better provision to encourage children and young people to take part in positive activities which will be of benefit to themselves and the community. However, sixth form colleges, childminders and childcare providers have more satisfactory provision in this respect. The pupil referral units are all satisfactory. The number of young people taking advantages of these opportunities is similar to that elsewhere in the country. Rates of teenage pregnancy have been high in Wigan and have reduced at a slower rate than found nationally. However, this year represents the greatest decrease since 1998. The number of young people who say they have been drunk or taken drugs has fallen. Only just over a half of young offenders are in suitable education, work or training, which is below the national average. The youth offending service is improving. For the last three years, there has been a continuing reduction in the number of young people found breaking the law for the first time and in the rates of re-offending. There has also been a distinct fall recently in the number of young people sentenced to custody. On each of these outcomes, the local authority's performance is in line with that found in similar areas or across England.

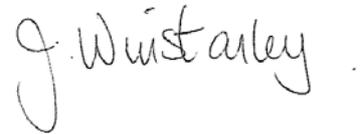
Most services are good at helping young people gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications needed to get a job. However, two out of the three pupil referral units are only satisfactory in this respect. The proportion of low-income families who take up their entitlement to childcare so that they can work has increased to a fifth. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training has fallen. Another positive development is the rise in the number of care leavers in work or training. This is now above the national average. The proportion of young people who have gained five good GCSEs or the equivalent by the age of 19 has risen in line with similar areas. However, 19-year-olds from low-income families perform less well than others of that age and below the average for their counterparts in similar local authorities. The proportion of 19-year-olds who have achieved two A levels or the equivalent has risen in line with performance in similar areas.

Prospects for improvement

Outcomes for children and young people continue to improve in this local authority. By defining clear goals, using performance clinics and providing targeted support, the local authority has brought about improvements in several areas, including enabling schools to come out of special measures quickly. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan is detailed and accurate and is clear about what has yet to be done, as well as what has been achieved. The local authority has set itself ambitious targets and its plans for the future focus on the right priorities. The seven key structural changes proposed have been carefully planned but, as the local authority recognises, some aspects, such as the capital strategy, will now have to be reviewed in the light of national developments.

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