

9 December 2010

Ms Elaine McHale
Corporate Director for Children's Services
City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
County Hall, Bond Street
Wakefield, West Yorkshire
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Dear Ms McHale

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.

City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in the City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council perform well.

A large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better. This good provision includes nursery schools and Early Years Foundation Stage settings, pupil referral units, colleges, local authority children's homes and the local fostering agency. Many childcare settings and most secondary and special schools are also good. School sixth forms do not do as well, with three of the four judged to be only satisfactory. Inspections show that four primary schools and the residential special school are inadequate.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found some strengths and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show the large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or similar areas. Results in national tests in 2009 are below those of similar areas for 11-year-olds but 16-year-olds do as well in examinations as their peers elsewhere. Too many primary schools do not reach the expected standards. The gap in achievement between children from low-income families and their peers is too large at the age of 11. Nineteen-year-olds in Wakefield gain around the same number of qualifications as those from similar areas. However, improvement in the number gaining five higher grade GCSEs or equivalent qualifications has been slow. The difference in achievement between those from low-income families and their peers in gaining two A levels or equivalent qualifications has improved since 2007.

Key areas for further development

- Improve attainment at the age of 11 and reduce the number of primary schools not meeting the expected standards.
- Improve the quality of school sixth forms so more are good or better.

Outcomes for children and young people

Nearly all services and settings are good at encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives, although the residential special school does not do as well. Improvements include better services for children with emotional or mental health difficulties, a high rate of screening for chlamydia and a continued reduction in the number of five-year-olds who are overweight. The number of 11-year-olds who are overweight went down in 2009 and more children are taking part in sport regularly. However, despite some improvement, not enough children say they are pleased with the parks in the area. There is good local knowledge of how many mothers are still

breast-feeding their babies after six weeks and increasing numbers are doing so. In an independent survey, fewer parents report they are satisfied with services for disabled children than parents elsewhere.

Ofsted's inspections of services and settings show that arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. These arrangements are not as strong for childminders, the local adoption agency and the residential special school. The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services noted the strength of the Social Care Direct team in ensuring there was a consistent and coordinated response to requests for help at all times. It also found that despite the local authority's efforts to recruit social workers, shortages were affecting the ability of staff to complete all assessments of vulnerable children's needs and that the quality of assessments was inconsistent. Once placed, children in care do not have to move home too often and are able to stay in this placement for a reasonable length of time. Families are found quickly for children who need to be adopted. Ensuring that children are safe within the community is a key priority for improvement in Wakefield. There has been better progress than seen nationally in reducing the number of children who are killed or seriously injured on the roads. The number of children admitted to hospital because of accidental or deliberate injury has reduced recently but is still higher than the national average.

Nearly all services and settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning, although this is not quite as good in the local adoption agency. Provision in pupil referral units, special schools, and both local authority and private and voluntary children's homes is also strong. The achievement of pupils at the end of the Reception Year improved very well in 2009 and the gap in achievement has narrowed at this age. However, performance is still below that of similar areas. The number of primary schools not reaching the expected standards increased considerably in 2009 and, by the end of primary school, children do not do as well as those in similar areas. Students in secondary schools did not do as well in examinations in 2009 but standards remain similar to those elsewhere. By the age of 16, almost half of young people gain five or more higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics. There has been a good rise in the number of young people who gain two good GCSEs in science and in the number who take A level mathematics. Provisional data for 2010 show the number of young people gaining good GCSE results has risen. Behaviour continues to improve and is almost always good in secondary schools, and the number of pupils who are often absent from secondary school is lower than in similar areas.

Successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for a long time. For example, the 'Engaging Our Futures' strategy which began in 2006 is continuing to enable young people to work with voluntary groups, schools and local services in activities and decision making in Wakefield. Most services and settings are also good at involving children and young people in decision making and activity in their communities. By most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well. Reoffending by young people in Wakefield has decreased significantly but is worse than in similar areas. There continues to be a good reduction in the number of young people caught

breaking the law for the first time. Similarly, fewer young people who have committed an offence get a custodial sentence. However, despite improvements, the number of young offenders who take part in education, employment or training is too low.

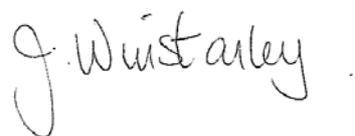
Most services and settings prepare children well for further education, training or work. Although increasing, not enough families on low incomes make sufficient use of the funding available for childcare. At the age of 19 young people gain a similar number of qualifications as their peers elsewhere. However, the number who gain five good GCSEs or equivalent qualifications is not rising as fast as in similar areas. The difference between those from low-income families who get two A levels or equivalent qualifications and others is improving. The local area has a priority to increase access to learning, employment and training opportunities for all young people and a range of initiatives is in place to make this happen. Most recent available data show a good improvement from a low base in the number of young people aged 17 who stay in education or are being trained. Similarly, the number of young people not in education, employment or training has improved well and is the lowest it has ever been. Recent data show a good improvement in the number of care leavers in education, employment or training, and the high number who are given a suitable place to live when they leave care has been maintained.

Prospects for improvement

Children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. The Children and Young People's Plan is linked to the local authority's key strategic plans for the area and has clear priorities. There are evidently some strong local partnerships as seen, for example, in the improvements in health outcomes and in the multi-agency not in education, employment or training strategy and action plan. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found that despite some shortages in social care staff, staff were working well, had good training opportunities and received good support from managers. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. A focus on improving outcomes at the end of the Reception Year has been successful and recent data show continued improvement. However, there is more to do to improve and sustain standards in education and improve the quality of school sixth forms.

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