

9 December 2010

Ms Deborah Brownlee
Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Trafford Town Hall, Talbot Road
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Dear Ms Brownlee

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.

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council's children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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In 2008 and 2009, children's services in Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council performed well. Continuing improvements mean that they now perform excellently.

Of the services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted, more of them are good or better this year than last. The number of inadequate primary schools has fallen from four to two. Last year there was one inadequate secondary school; now none of them is inadequate and the very large majority are good or better. Private fostering arrangements, which were previously inadequate, are now good. More pupil referral units and children's homes are good and all the sixth forms inspected are now good or better.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found several strengths and there were no areas for priority action. A more recent inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children reported that services were good.

National performance indicators show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for similar areas and for England. Results in national tests for 11- and 16-year-olds are above average. However, 16-year-olds with special education needs or who come from low-income families achieve less well than others of the same age. In the second case, the gap in performance is widening. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is in line with similar areas and improving.

Key area for further development

- Improve the achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families or who have special educational needs, so that there is less of a gap between their performance and that of other young people of the same age.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to ensure that children and young people live healthy lives are successful. Nearly all schools and the large majority of children's homes, childminders and child carers are good or better at this. However, one of the fostering and adoption services provided by private and voluntary agencies is only satisfactory. All outcomes are at least in line with the averages elsewhere. Improvements include more children and young people taking part in physical activities and sport and more women breast-feeding their children. Fewer five-year-olds but more 11-year-olds are very overweight but, in both cases, the figures are in line with those for similar areas.

Arrangement for keeping children and young people safe are successful. The very large majority of settings are good or better at this. The recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services shows that they are good in terms of their overall effectiveness and their capacity to improve. Agencies work together to support children at an early stage, so that the numbers who go into care or become the subject of a child protection plan are low. The local authority and its partners have also been effective in reducing the proportion of children who become the subject of a protection plan for more than two years. The most recent figures show that initial assessments of children's social care needs are being completed more quickly. Fewer children are becoming the subject of a child protection plan more than once, suggesting that initial plans were successful and well timed. The number of times that children in care have to move home has fallen and more of them have been with the same family for two years or longer. The local authority is quicker than most in finding homes for children who are to be adopted.

The very large majority of primary, secondary and special schools are good or better at helping young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The same is true of the large majority of childminders and child carers. Last year, the pupil referral units were mostly satisfactory in this respect. This year, three of the four inspected are good or better. Inspection reports show that provision is very good in the local authority children's home visited but only satisfactory in one of children's homes run by the private and voluntary sector. For the last five years, the achievement of three- to five-year-olds has been consistently above the average for similar local authorities. During their time in primary school, the large majority of children make the progress expected of them and, in national tests, 11-year-olds out-perform others of the same age in similar areas. Children in care perform well above the average across the country but not as well as others of the same age within the local authority. The number of 16-year-olds gaining good GCSE grades in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, is higher than in similar areas. The same is true of those achieving two or more good grades in science. However, 16-year-olds who have special education needs, or who receive free school meals, achieve less well than others of the same age. In the case of the second group, the gap between their performance and that of their peers is widening. Behaviour is good or better in the very large majority of secondary schools and absence rates are in line with those in similar areas.

Services and settings vary in the quality of support they provide for children and young people to take up activities that will enrich their own and others' lives. The provision made by the very large majority of schools and the large majority of childminders and child carers is good or very good. The same is true of the provision by the local authority's adoption and fostering agencies. However, the children's homes, the pupil referral units and residential family centre are mainly satisfactory in this respect. Most outcomes are in line with or above the averages elsewhere. Improvements include a fall in the number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time and a considerable increase in the number of young offenders living in suitable accommodation. However, more young offenders are being sentenced to custody and the number of young people who say that they have

been drunk or taken drugs has increased. More young people than in similar areas are caught breaking the law more than once but, in most respects, the youth offending service works well.

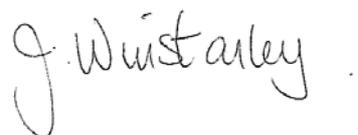
The very large majority of services and settings make good or very good provision to enable young people to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to gain employment. However, two of the three pupil referral units are only satisfactory in this respect. The proportion of working families on low incomes who take up their entitlement to childcare has risen to a quarter, which is higher than average. There has also been a steady rise in the number of 17-year-olds continuing in education and training. Another positive development is the fall in the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training. The number of care leavers in work or continuing with their education has risen but is still lower than the national average. There has been a consistent improvement in the number of 19-year-olds who have gained five good GCSEs or the equivalent and the figure is now above average. Although a smaller proportion of 19-year-olds from low-income families achieve these levels, the gap between their performance and that of others of the same age is smaller than in similar areas. The number of 19-year-olds who have achieved two A levels or the equivalent has also risen to above average.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority has built successfully on its earlier good performance to produce services that are now performing excellently. With its support, one school was removed from special measures in three months and another judged to be inadequate is making satisfactory progress. The Children and Young People's Plan and the termly summary of completed actions show a consistent approach to improvement and a clear focus on the right priorities. For example, additional funding has been allocated to raise achievement in those schools where there are wide gaps in attainment between particular groups. The local authority is also working with its neighbours to produce a 'footprint spreadsheet' to help plan the support for children and young people from low-income families. Good use is made of self-assessment to refine policies. The draft Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse strategies and the related awareness raising activities are good examples of this. A focus on developing capacity further is reflected in a number of areas, including the successful campaign to recruit and retain more social workers.

This children's service 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