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Mr Andrew Webb
Director of Children's Services
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Children and Young People's Directorate, 3rd Floor
Stopford House, Town Hall
Stockport SK1 3XE

Dear Mr Webb

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.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of provision is good or better overall and helps children and young people to stay safe and enjoy learning. The strengths and areas for further improvement have not changed significantly since last year.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found clear strengths in terms of preventative and multi-agency work. There were no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- As in 2010, the large majority of providers of early years and childcare are good or better. However, there is still a small number of childminders who are inadequate, mainly because of limited understanding of the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and insufficient planning for children's learning.
- For children under five, the provision in the very large majority of nurseries and primary schools is good or better; a situation which is very similar to last year. Of the five children's centres inspected over the last year, four were judged to be good and one is outstanding. Since 2006, the achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been consistently in line with similar areas and above the averages nationally. The achievement gap at this age between children from low-income families and their contemporaries is closing. It is now in line with similar areas but continues to be greater than the average across the country.
- As was the case last year, the very large majority of primary schools are good or better and they all make a very good contribution to helping children to keep safe. The attainment of 11-year-olds has been above the national average for four years. Last year it was also above the average for similar areas. Provisional figures for 2011 indicate that this strong performance has been maintained.
- For the last five years, GCSE examination results for 16-year-olds achieving A* to C in five subjects, including English and mathematics, have been in line with the averages for similar areas and above those for England. Over the same period, the proportion of 19-year-olds achieving the equivalent of two A level passes has been in line with the averages nationally and for similar areas.

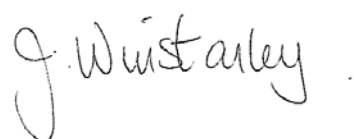
- Five of the six special schools maintained by the local authority are good or better. The sixth school is satisfactory and is making satisfactory progress in demonstrating better capacity for sustained improvement. As in 2010, one pupil referral unit is good and the other two are outstanding.
- The local authority's adoption and fostering agencies have not been re-inspected since last year. They are both outstanding.
- Since last year, one of the children's homes run by the local authority has received a full inspection and the other an interim, unannounced inspection. They were both judged to be good overall, with the first being outstanding at helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do. Of the 22 children's homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities, 20 are good or better and the remaining two are satisfactory.

Areas for further improvement

- There is a continuing need to improve the quality of secondary schools. Last year, none of the 13 schools maintained by the local authority was outstanding. This year one of them is outstanding. However, a third are still no better than satisfactory.
- For the last four years, the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in work or any form of education or training has been higher in Stockport than in similar areas but fell to just below the national figure in 2010. As in 2010, there is variability in the provision for learning after the age of 16. Of the five providers in the area, two are outstanding, one is good and two are satisfactory.
- The gap in attainment between 16-year-olds who receive free school meals and others of the same age has narrowed over the last two years. It is now narrower than for similar local authorities but wider than the average nationally. For 19-year-olds achieving level 2 qualifications, the gap between those from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed over the last two years. It is now slightly wider than the average for similar areas and wider than the average nationally. For 19-year-olds achieving level 3 qualifications, the gap between the two groups has widened over the last two years and is now wider than the averages nationally and for similar areas.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment