

9 December 2009

Mr Paul Greenhalgh  
Director of Children's Services  
Southend Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Victoria Avenue  
Southend-on-Sea  
Essex  
SS2 6ER

Dear Mr Greenhalgh

## Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

## Children's services rating 2009

<b>Children's services rating</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Southend-on-sea Borough Council perform well.

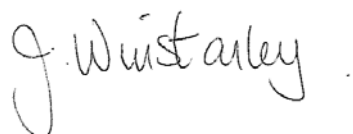
The overall effectiveness of a large majority of inspected services and settings is good or better. A higher than average proportion of childminders, nursery provision, primary schools and school sixth forms are good or outstanding. The proportion of good childcare settings and secondary schools is broadly average. Post-16 provision in the further education college is good.

Specialist provision and services for children and young people whose circumstances make them more vulnerable is variable in quality. The 2007 joint area review judged safeguarding and services for children in the care of the local authority as adequate. Since then inspections have judged the local authority's fostering and adoption agencies as good and its private fostering arrangements as adequate. One serious case review has been undertaken during the period April 2007 to July 2009 and was conducted well. Fewer special schools in the borough are good than in similar areas or nationally and the large pupil referral unit remains adequate. Moreover, special schools and the pupil referral unit do not do as well as those in similar areas in making a good contribution to young people achieving economic well-being and enjoying and achieving.

Performance against a very large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with similar areas and national figures. The local authority performs very well in relation to some areas of staying safe, enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution. For example, improvements in the percentage of referrals of children in need to social care going on to initial assessment, the rate of reduction of teenage pregnancies and examination results for pupils aged 16 from most ethnic groups. However, the difference in test and examination results of children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and others of their age is too large. Pupils who are identified as having special educational needs and those from lower income families achieve poorly when they are aged 11 and 16. Consequently, the achievement gap with their peers is much larger than in similar authorities and nationally and for 16-year-olds the gap is increasing. The achievement of level 3 qualifications by young people from lower income families is also very low and fewer than average progress to higher education.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

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' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, CAA