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Mr Peter Morgan
Strategic Director - Children, Schools and Families
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Children, Schools and Families
9th Floor, Merton House
Stanley Road, Bootle
Merseyside, L20 3JA

Dear Mr Morgan

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.

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs well (3) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|

Children's services in Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council continue to perform well. This performance has been sustained since 2010. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and most provision effectively helps children and young people to stay safe and learn. The main strengths and areas for development show some improvement, for example in performance at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and in narrowing the gap in achievement for children from low-income families and their peers. There is very little inadequate provision.

The recent full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services judged safeguarding to be adequate overall with some good and outstanding features and good capacity to improve. Looked after children services are judged to be good with some outstanding features and with good capacity to improve. The report highlights good leadership and effective partnership working as important features of both services.

Strengths

- The large majority of early years and childcare settings continue to perform well. Two children's centres inspected for the first time have been judged to be good and outstanding. Nursery and primary schools continue to demonstrate strong performance with very little provision that is only satisfactory.
- Educational standards continue to improve year-on-year and all key stages are at least in line with the average for similar areas and nationally.
- The percentage of very young children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Year's Foundation Stage has increased significantly over the last year and the gap in achievement between children from low-income families and the rest has narrowed. Standards in national tests for 11-year-olds continue to improve, and provisional results for 2011 show performance to be strong.
- Nearly all secondary schools are good or better. Over time more 16-year-olds, including those from low-income families and with special educational needs, are gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE including mathematics and English. As a result the gap in achievement between these two groups and other children of the same age in Sefton has narrowed since 2008. Standards overall for all 16-year-olds continue to improve year-on-year and are in line with similar areas and the national average.

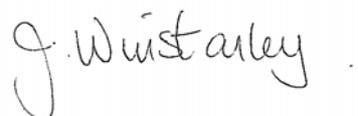
- In further education settings, more young people achieve the equivalent to good GCSEs and higher level qualifications by the age of 19 years than elsewhere in the country and the gap between those young people from low-income families and other young people in Sefton is narrowing faster than in similar areas. This demonstrates further strong improvement since last year, and reflects the impact of the local authority's on-going commitment to focus priorities on narrowing the gaps in achievement between all children and more vulnerable groups.
- Nearly all education provision for children with special educational needs, with the exception of one independent special school, is good or outstanding and performance has been sustained since last year.
- The local authority fostering agency has improved and is now good, with some outstanding features. The adoption service has also improved and is now good. Three of the four local authority children's homes are good or better as are most of those homes commissioned by the local authority; a children's home commissioned by the local authority which was inadequate in January 2011 is now good.
- A re-inspection of the youth offending service judged stronger performance in aspects of youth justice and progress to be encouraging with firm foundations in place for sustained improvement.

Areas for further improvement

- The recent inspection of safeguarding services identified a number of areas requiring attention, and most urgently improvement is needed in the management oversight of social work intervention and better case work recording by social workers.
- Some key areas of provision are only satisfactory. One third of secondary school sixth forms are satisfactory and one school is inadequate; this inadequate school is going through the official procedure of closure as part of a local re-organisation of post-16 provision. Two previously good schools have been judged as satisfactory when inspected this year. One of two pupil referral units is now satisfactory and this shows a decline in overall effectiveness from last year when both were good.

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