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Ms Sarah Norman
Director for Children and Young People
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Dear Ms Norman

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.

Wolverhampton City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Wolverhampton City Council perform well. This performance has been maintained since 2010. The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and most provision helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. Areas of strength and those for further improvement remain similar to last year. Since 2010, two secondary schools have merged and gained academy status; their previous inspection judgements have been taken into account for the 2011 assessment.

An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection in October 2010 found several strengths and areas for development, together with a number of areas where services were found to be satisfactory in accordance with statutory guidance. A full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services carried out in 2011 judged safeguarding to be adequate and looked after children services as good. Both have good capacity to improve. The report identifies good and improving preventative and early intervention services, and that the council and its partners demonstrate strong commitment to safeguarding the most vulnerable children and those who are looked after.

Strengths

- Very good progress has been made in the Early Years Foundation Stage with more young children, including those from low-income families, achieving a good level of development. However the achievement gap between the low-income group and others of the same age in Wolverhampton has widened consistently since 2006, although there has been a slight improvement in 2010.
- Six children's centres that were inspected for the first time are all good or outstanding.
- Since last year, the numbers of secondary schools that have received good or better judgements from inspection have improved. Two secondary schools have moved from satisfactory to good and one that was inadequate is now also good. Persistent absence has continued to reduce significantly and is lower than in similar areas. Increasingly higher numbers of 16-year-olds are achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics, year on year in Wolverhampton. The rate of improvement over four years has been strong and performance is in line with similar areas and the national average. Pupils from low-income families do better than their peers in similar areas. Asian pupils at this age also perform well and do better than all other pupils of

the same age in Wolverhampton, achieving GCSE results that are consistently above those of their peers in similar areas and nationally.

- Provision for 16-to 19-year-olds in secondary school sixth forms is variable but the majority is good or better. The general further education college is good. More young people are now achieving good GCSE or equivalent qualifications and higher level qualifications equivalent to two A levels year-on-year and, although consistently lower than the national average, are in line with similar areas. The gap in level 2 attainment between young people from low-income families and others of the same age in Wolverhampton has narrowed over the last four years and is now smaller than the national average and in similar areas. In 2009 the proportion of 17-year-olds in training or education continued to rise and is better than in similar areas.
- All specialist education provision and three of the four pupil referral units are good or better. The third is satisfactory having previously been inadequate.
- The very large majority of local authority children's homes and those commissioned by the local authority are good or better. This shows strong improvement since 2010. The local authority's fostering service and the private adoption agency are both good.
- A recent inspection of the youth offending service judged systems to be well organised and a strong ethos of collaborative working. These notable strengths and the approach by the management team to ensure continuous improvement is highlighted by inspectors in the report.

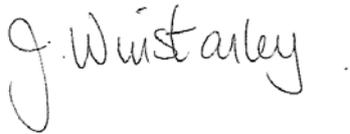
Areas for further improvement

- Some key areas of provision remain satisfactory or are inadequate. While the majority of primary schools are good or better, approximately one third remains satisfactory demonstrating performance that continues to be below that in similar areas, as in 2010. One secondary school is now inadequate. The most recent Ofsted monitoring letter confirms satisfactory progress is being made since the school went in to special measures and support from the local authority has been effective in helping the school to improve. The recently inspected local authority adoption service and the private fostering agency are both satisfactory.
- Provisional performance data for 2011 shows that attainment at age 11 remains at the same level as last year overall, which in 2010 was in line with the average in similar areas and nationally.
- Narrowing the gap in achievement continues to be a key priority for Wolverhampton. At 16-years-old, the gap in achievement between all pupils and those with special educational needs has increased since 2009, and this group does less well than others of the same age in similar areas. Although widening over time, the gap in achievement between those

students from low-income families and those who are not, has remained static since 2008 and is in line with the national average.

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