

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 7421 6666
Direct F 020 7421 5633
Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Keith Moore
Executive Director of Children's Services
Sunderland City Council
The Civic Centre
Sunderland
SR2 7DN

Dear Mr Moore

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.

Sunderland City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Sunderland City Council perform well. This good performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and provision continues to support children and young people well in their learning and staying safe. An important achievement this year is the improvement in the quality of children's homes overall. As elsewhere, school provision is changing and more academies opened in 2011. The most recent inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in making this assessment.

Ofsted's last inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection took place in July 2010 when three strengths, many satisfactory aspects of practice and a number of areas for development were identified. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention.

Strengths

- For children under five, the large majority of nurseries are good or outstanding. All the children's centres inspected provide good support to children, parents and carers. The majority of registered day-care provision is good. Over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved at a faster rate than nationally. Levels of development match the average in similar areas and the gap between very young children from low-income families and all children of the same age in Sunderland is closing.
- The local authority provides good support to the small number of schools that are, or have been, in an Ofsted category of concern. Ofsted monitoring visits to these schools show that support to bring about improvement has been well targeted and effective.
- The proportion of good local authority schools remains the same as last year. At the age of 16 young people's results at GCSEs A* to C including English and mathematics match those in similar areas and, over the past four years, they have risen at a faster pace than the national rate of improvement. Provisional results for 2011 show further improvement.
- As reported in 2010, all special schools, the special school sixth forms and the independent special school are good or better.
- The provision for post-16 education is consistently good in the colleges. Of the two specialist colleges for young people with autistic spectrum disorders, one is good and the other is outstanding. Provision is also good in one of the three special school sixth forms, but the other two are only satisfactory. Outcomes are improving and the proportion of 19-year-olds,

including those from a low-income background, achieving a level 2 or a level 3 qualification matches the average in similar local authorities.

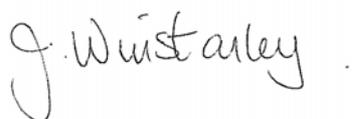
- Over the past few years, action has been taken to reduce the number of young people not in education, training or work. Local data show that targets have been achieved and overall rates now match the average in similar areas.
- A review of commissioning arrangements for young people's services was conducted in Sunderland, in March 2011, as part of an Ofsted national survey. It identified much good practice and reported that providers worked well together to improve levels of participation and outcomes achieved by young people across the city. Young people's involvement in decision-making at a local level and in strategy is well embedded.
- For looked after children and young people, provision is mostly good in the children's homes and this is an improvement on 2010. The fostering and adoption agencies are also good.

Areas for further improvement

- There has been little improvement to childminding provision over the year and almost half is only satisfactory, as it was in 2010.
- Well over a third of primary schools are now only satisfactory and this is a decline since last year. Key Stage 2 results are below the average for similar areas, although provisional results for 2011 show improvement.
- Overall, too much secondary provision is only satisfactory and some is inadequate. The number of satisfactory local authority secondary schools, including those which are now academies remains the same as it was in 2010. The inadequate local authority school, inspected in June 2010, is making satisfactory progress. However, during the year one academy has been inspected and is now inadequate. Three of the four pupil referral units remain only satisfactory. Good attendance in all secondary schools is yet to be achieved and the overall rate of persistent absence was above similar areas in the last reporting year.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment