

8 November 2011

Mr Bob Hepworth  
Acting Director of Children and Young People's Services  
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council  
Atlas House  
Corporation Street  
St Helens  
Merseyside WA9 1LD

Dear Mr Hepworth

## 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.

## St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs adequately (2)</b>
---------------------------------------	--------------------------------

Children's services in St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately. The good performance of last year has not been sustained from 2010 to 2011. Four of the nine secondary schools are only satisfactory and the two schools inspected in 2011 do not demonstrate overall improvement from previous inspections. The gap in attainment at the age of 16 has widened for some young people. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and provision helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. During this academic year, one satisfactory secondary school with a satisfactory sixth form became an academy and this judgement has been taken account of in this year's assessment.

In 2011, Ofsted's unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified one strength, a range of practice which meets statutory requirements and six areas for development. While most issues identified in the previous inspection carried out in May 2010 have been addressed some key concerns remain.

### Strengths

- Nursery and primary school provision has improved since last year and the very large majority are now good or better. The one inadequate primary school is now satisfactory. By the age of five, the percentage of very young children who achieve a good level of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased over a four year period. More children from low-income families are now doing better than their peers in similar areas and the gap has narrowed most recently and is now smaller when compared to the gap in similar areas.
- Educational standards have improved steadily over the last four years for most children aged 11 and 16 years. In 2010, results for national tests for 11-years-olds were better than those in similar areas and nationally and provisional data for 2011 continues this trend of improvement. Increasing numbers of young people at the age of 16 continue year on year to achieve five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics, which in 2010 were in line with similar areas and the national average. For 2011, provisional data show further improvement in the proportion of young people achieving five or more good GCSEs.
- By the age of 19 more young people year on year are achieving qualifications at level 2, the equivalent of at least five good GCSE grades and at the higher level 3, the equivalent to two or more A levels, in line with similar areas. The gap in achievement between young people from

low-income families achieving level 2 and level 3 qualifications and their peers in St Helens has narrowed over time in line with similar areas.

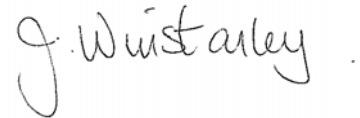
- Special schools and the pupil referral units continue to provide good and outstanding services and performance shows further improvement since 2010.
- The local authority's adoption and fostering services are good, as are the private fostering and adoption agencies they commission. Two of the three local authority's children's homes are now good, an improvement since last year, and the large majority of children's home provision commissioned by the local authority is good. There is no inadequate provision for looked after children.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- The most recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements identifies several areas requiring attention including some unresolved from the previous inspection. These include excessive case loads for some social workers, cases where the level of complexity and risk are too high for the workers they are placed with, and the variable quality of initial and core assessments. The local authority is taking decisive action to bring about improvement and reports a positive direction of travel in many areas.
- Early years settings are too variable in quality and a large percentage of childminder provision remains satisfactory. This has not improved significantly since 2010.
- As in 2010, four secondary schools out of nine are satisfactory and the percentage of good and better provision is not as high as is found in similar areas and nationally. The two most recent school inspections judged overall effectiveness as satisfactory demonstrating no overall improvement from previous inspections. The general further education college has deteriorated in its overall effectiveness from good to satisfactory.
- The number of 16-year-olds with special educational needs has remained relatively stable and is much lower than similar areas and the national average. However, while historically the level of attainment has increased year on year this has slowed down recently and the gap in achievement for this group of young people in St Helens and their peers in similar areas has widened.
- For 16-year-olds from low-income families gaining five or more good GCSEs, the gap in achievement between this group and their peers in St Helens has remained stable since 2008/09. While both cohorts have increased their levels of attainment over time, the gap between them has increased and is wider than similar areas and 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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment