

9 December 2009

Mrs Sue Richardson
Director of Children and Young People's Services
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Atlas House
Rivington Road
Corporation Street
St Helens
Merseyside
WA9 1LD

Dear Mrs Richardson

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

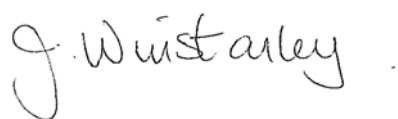
Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The overall effectiveness of the large majority of inspected services and settings is good or better. A very high proportion of nursery schools are good and childcare performance overall compares favourably with statistical neighbours. The majority of primary schools and four out of 10 secondary schools achieve good or better judgments but both settings do not do as well as similar areas. Too many secondary schools are only satisfactory and one has been judged to be inadequate. School sixth forms, the general further education college and the sixth form college all provide good or outstanding education post-16 and demonstrate better performance than found in similar areas and nationally. Most special schools, the pupil referral units, children's homes and the local authority fostering and adoption agencies all provide good or better services but private fostering arrangements are only satisfactory. Judgements for all Every Child Matters outcomes are good or better in a large majority of inspected services and settings. The joint area review in May 2008 judged services for looked after children and safeguarding to be good.

Performance against a very large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with or above similar areas and national averages. The local authority does well in areas of staying safe, with continuing good performance in completing initial and core assessments and completion of child protection plans within the required timescales. Educational outcomes for most children and young people are good and improving and the gaps in outcomes for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age are consistent with or better than similar areas and found nationally. The numbers of young people not in education, employment or training are reducing at a faster rate than similar areas, although participation of 17-years-old in education or training has declined.

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA