

9 December 2010

Mr Andrew Webb
Director of Children's Services
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
3rd Floor, Stopford House
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Dear Mr Webb

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes 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 data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against 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:

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| 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 2009, 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.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

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

Children's services in Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of settings, services and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. In nursery and primary schools most provision is good, a quarter of it is outstanding and none of it is inadequate. At secondary level, however, there is no outstanding provision. Almost a half of secondary schools are only satisfactory and one is inadequate. The academy is also inadequate. Half the further education and sixth form colleges are outstanding and there is no inadequate provision. The same is true of the maintained special schools and the specialist sixth forms. Of the three pupil referral units inspected, two are outstanding and one is good. Childminding and childcare provision is mainly good but in around a third of cases it is no better than satisfactory. The local authority's adoption agency and children's homes are good and its fostering agency is outstanding. The large majority of private and voluntary children's homes are good or better. One is inadequate but this is not used by the local authority.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found several strengths and some areas for development but there were no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show that almost all outcomes are in line with, or above, the averages for England or for similar areas. The most recent unvalidated results show that 11-year-olds performed better in national tests than their peers elsewhere. The proportion of 16-year-olds who achieve good grades in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, is in line with the averages in similar areas. Children who receive free school meals achieve less well than others of the same age and the gap in performance is widening. Behaviour is good or outstanding in less than half of secondary schools. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is higher than in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better and more of them have high standards of behaviour.
- Raise the achievement of children who receive free school meals, so that there is less of a gap between their performance and that of others of the same age.
- Reduce the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are successful. Inspection reports show that the large majority of settings are good or very good at this. However, one sixth form college and the academy are only satisfactory. Most outcomes are in line with those elsewhere. Improvements include an increase in the take-up of school lunches and in the proportion of mothers who breast-feed their children. More children and young people are taking part in physical activities and sport and more of them are satisfied with local parks and play areas.

Arrangements to keep children and young people safe are secure. The large majority of services and settings are good or better at this, although childminders are only satisfactory. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services highlighted: the effective partnership work between agencies; the high quality of risk assessments; and the timely decisions and actions taken in relation to children in need of protection. However, the report also referred to delays in dealing with some less urgent cases. Most outcomes are in line with averages elsewhere. The number of children killed or injured in road traffic accidents has fallen, as has the number admitted to hospital because of injuries. More initial assessments of children's social care needs are being carried out on time. However, more children are becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second time, suggesting that the initial plan was not effective or was terminated too early. There has been a reduction in the average number of times that children in care have to move home and a higher proportion of them have been with the same family for two years or more.

The large majority of settings are good or better at helping children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. The proportion of secondary schools inspected that are good or better at this has risen. All the children's homes and pupil referral units and almost all the special schools are good or outstanding in this respect, although one sixth form college visited is only satisfactory. Over the last five years, the achievement of children aged three to five years has improved in line with the averages for similar areas. During their time in primary school, the large majority of children make the progress expected of them and, in the most recent national tests, 11-year-olds achieved better than their peers in similar authorities. Children in care achieve as well as those in care elsewhere but less well than other children in the authority. The number of 16-year-olds gaining good GCSE grades in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, continues to rise in line with similar authorities. Over the last four years, persistent absence from secondary schools has fallen and performance here has improved to be in line with the average for similar areas. However, less than half of the secondary schools in the authority have good or outstanding behaviour.

The large majority of settings are good or better at encouraging children and young people to take part in activities which will enrich their own lives and those of others. The number of children and young people actually taking part has risen over the last year and is now higher than the national average. The number of young people who say that they have taken drugs or been drunk has fallen, as has the rate of teenage pregnancy. The number of young people caught breaking the law more than once is

higher than in similar areas but, in most respects, the youth offending service works well. Other outcomes remain in line with those elsewhere.

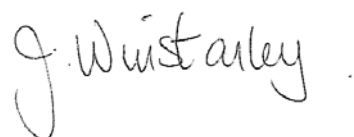
Primary and special schools are good at enabling young people to develop the knowledge and skills that will eventually help them to get jobs. However, the sixth form colleges and secondary schools are only satisfactory at this and the academy is inadequate. The number of people from low-income families who take up their entitlement to childcare so that they can work continues to be higher than the national average. The proportion of 17-year-olds continuing with their education beyond the statutory age is similar to that in other authorities of this type. However, the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is higher than in similar areas and has got worse over the last three years. The percentage of young people leaving care who continue with their education or take up work or training has fluctuated. The most recent figures show that 68.8% did so in 2009/10. There has been a steady rise in the number of 19-year-olds who have the equivalent of five good GCSE passes. The same is true of young people of this age who have two A levels or the equivalent. For the last two years, the proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation has risen, with the most recent figures showing that 91% of them are now suitably housed.

Prospects for improvement

The authority has succeeded in maintaining its good performance. The very large majority of outcomes are in line with averages elsewhere and there have been improvements in several areas targeted for particular attention, such as reducing absence rates in secondary schools and increasing the number of initial assessments completed on time. The most recent inspection of the council's adoption service rated it as outstanding. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan shows that the authority has a clear understanding of where further improvements are needed. The *We Will* document identifies a number of priorities for the future, together with action plans, milestones and a delivery plan, designed to ensure further improvements in each area.

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' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment