

9 December 2010

Mr Nick Page
Acting Strategic Director of Children's Services
Salford City Council
Minerva House, Pendlebury Road
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Dear Mr Page

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:

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.

Salford City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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In 2009, Salford City Council's children's services were adequate. This year they are performing poorly because of continuing significant weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services, conducted in August 2009, identified areas for priority action. A subsequent full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services took place in May 2010. This found that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Salford is inadequate and that the capacity of the services to improve is also inadequate. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is adequate, as is their capacity for improvement.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Provision in nursery and the early years of primary schools is good, as is much of that in secondary schools, pupil referral units and children's homes. The further education college and the local authority's adoption and fostering agencies are outstanding. Just over half of childminders and child carers and almost two-thirds of primary schools are good or better. The two secondary school sixth forms inspected are adequate.

National performance measures show that most outcomes are in line with the averages for England and for similar areas. As a result of a national boycott, too few of the local authority's schools took part in the end of Key Stage 2 tests to make it possible to assess the attainment of 11-year-olds in 2010. In 2009, attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 was in line with similar local authorities. Data for the last five years show that 16-year-olds who receive free school meals achieve less well than others of the same age and the gap between the two groups is widening. The picture is very similar for 16-year-olds who have special educational needs. Despite recent improvements, fewer 19-year-olds than in similar areas have five good GCSE passes or the equivalent.

Key areas for further development

- Improve safeguarding services.
- Raise the attainment of 16-year-olds who receive free school meals, or who have special educational needs, so that they perform as well as others of the same age.
- Increase the number of 19-year-olds, especially those from low-income families, who have five good GCSE passes or the equivalent.
- Improve primary schools, so that more of them are good or better.
- Improve the effectiveness of childminders and child carers.

Outcomes for children and young people

The large majority of services and settings make good or better arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives. However, childminders and child carers are only adequate at this. All outcomes are at least in line with those elsewhere. Improvements include: more mothers breast-feeding their babies; fewer five- and 11-year-olds who are very overweight; more children and young people being satisfied with local parks and play areas; and more of them taking part in physical activities and sport.

The recent inspection of safeguarding services found that they were inadequate, both in terms of their overall effectiveness and their capacity to improve. However, the same inspection found that services for looked after services were adequate in both respects. The report found that there had been insufficient progress in tackling the weaknesses identified in the earlier unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services. However, the newly-established senior management team was taking rigorous steps to identify the challenges and had responded positively to issues raised during the inspection. Overall inspection outcomes relating to keeping children and young people safe in the majority of services and settings such as schools are generally in line with those elsewhere. However, despite improvements, almost a third of children who responded to a recent survey say they have been bullied. It is taking longer to arrange adoptions but a higher proportion of children in care have been with the same family for two or more years.

The large majority of childminders and primary and secondary schools are good or better at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. This is also the case with most other services, apart from the pupil referral units which are mainly satisfactory. For the last five years, the achievement of three- to five-year-olds has been above the averages for similar areas. In 2010, because of the national boycott, too few primary schools took part in national tests to allow for an accurate assessment of 11-year-olds' achievement. However, in the previous five years, results both in English and mathematics rose in line with the averages for similar areas, with children in care performing considerably better than their counterparts elsewhere.

From 2007 to 2009, the proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five or more good GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics, rose in line with the averages for similar areas. However, despite improvements, the proportion gaining two or more good GCSE science qualifications remained below average. For the last five years, 16-year-olds who receive free schools meals have fallen increasingly behind others of the same age. The same is true of 16-year-olds who have special educational needs. At secondary level, the large majority of schools have good or better behaviour and persistent absence is far lower than in similar areas. However, the proportions of special education needs statements issued on time are lower than the averages nationally.

Most types of providers are good or better at encouraging children and young people to take part in activities that will be of benefit to themselves and to others. Here again, however, childminders and child carers have more satisfactory provision. The same is true of children's homes not run by the local authority. The academy is also satisfactory in this respect. Almost all outcomes are in line with or above those elsewhere. However, in a recent national survey more young people who responded said that they have been drunk or taken drugs recently than in similar areas. The number of young people who are caught breaking the law more than once is close to the figure for similar areas and, in most respects, the youth offending service works well.

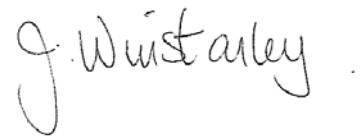
The majority of secondary schools are good or better at helping young people develop the knowledge and skills necessary to gain a job. However, primary schools do less well and almost a half are only adequate. The large majority of other providers make good provision in this area. Outcomes are variable. The number of low-income families who have taken up their entitlement to childcare has increased steadily so that, according to the latest figures, almost a quarter do so. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training has been consistently lower than in similar areas and has improved further. Over the last five years, the proportion of young people leaving care who continue with their education or enter work or training has fluctuated because of the low numbers involved. The figure dropped in 2009 but has risen again by ten percentage points to 85%. The percentage of 19-year-olds who have gained five good GCSE passes or the equivalent has risen but is still lower than in similar local authorities. Those from low-income families do less well in this respect than others of the same age. The situation is better in relation to 19-year-olds who have gained two A levels or the equivalent. Here there has been a steady improvement over recent years, in line with the averages in similar areas. The proportion of care leavers who are found a suitable place to live has risen steadily and currently stands at 100%.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority's children's services assessment has declined because it has not taken sufficiently robust action to tackle weaknesses in its safeguarding services which were first identified in the annual performance assessment in 2007. The May 2010 safeguarding and looked after children inspection report found that capacity for improvement was adequate in the case of services for looked after children but inadequate where safeguarding services were concerned. The report commended the rigorous steps being taken by the newly-established senior management team to identify the challenges. It also referred to the visibility and approachability of the new senior management team and the confidence they had engendered in staff at all levels that the challenges were being tackled effectively. Since then, further progress has been made through the establishment of an improvement board, with an independent chair reporting to Ministers, and the enlisting of peer support and advice from another local authority. A comprehensive action plan has also been approved by the independently chaired improvement board. The recent inspection of the local authority's fostering agency (Salford Family Placement Service) judged it to be good overall.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment