

9 December 2010

Ms Cheryl Eastwood
Executive Director of Children, Schools and Families
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Floor 7, Municipal Offices
Smith Street
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Dear Ms Eastwood

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.

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council perform well, as they did last year.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Most of the primary and secondary schools fall into this category, as do the nurseries, childminders and childcare providers. However, there is one inadequate primary school and six of the childminders inspected were unsatisfactory. Of the four maintained special schools inspected, three are good and one is satisfactory. The independent special schools, the special sixth form provision and the pupil referral unit are good. The further education college is only satisfactory, as is most of the secondary sixth form provision. The local authority's adoption agency is good and its fostering agency is outstanding. Of the four local authority children's homes inspected, two are good and the others are satisfactory. The large majority of the private and voluntary children's homes are good or better.

An unannounced inspection of front-line services in December 2009, identified a number of areas for development and three areas for priority action, relating to risk assessment, progression of child protection investigations and the timeliness of initial child protection case conferences. A later full inspection of safeguarding and looked after services found that a detailed action plan had been drawn up to tackle these weaknesses and some improvements had been achieved although further work was needed to improve the services at the point of access. Provision was judged to be adequate in terms of overall effectiveness and the capacity to improve.

National performance measures show that almost all outcomes are in line with, or above, the averages for England and for similar areas. Results in national tests show that 11- and 16-year-olds achieve as well as their peers elsewhere. However, 16-year-olds from low-income families do less well than others of the same age and the gap in performance is widening. The same is true of 16-year-olds with special educational needs.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the educational performance of 16-year-olds from low-income families so that they do as well as others of the same age.
- Reduce the gap between the achievement of 16-year-olds with special needs and others of the same age.
- Improve the quality of sixth form provision so that more of it is good or better.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are, in most cases, successful. The large majority of services make good or very good provision for this. However, childminders and the local authority's children's homes have more satisfactory provision in this respect. The take-up of school lunches has increased at both primary and secondary level and is now above the national average. The proportion of mothers who breast-feed their children is lower than the national average but attendance at clinics has increased considerably. Fewer five- and 11-year-olds are very overweight and more children and young people are taking part in physical activities and sport. The number of children and young people who are satisfied with local parks and play areas has risen but is still lower than the national average.

In December 2009, the unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified three areas of priority action and a further 10 areas for development. A recent full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services found that progress had been made in tackling these weaknesses and services were now adequate, both in terms of their overall effectiveness and their capacity to improve. Almost all outcomes are in line with averages elsewhere. Improvements include: fewer children being bullied; children in care having to move home less frequently; and a higher proportion of them who have been with the same family for two or more years. However, the number of injured children who have to be admitted to hospital has increased and there has been a fall in the number of initial and core assessments of children's social care needs which are completed on time.

Childminders, childcare providers, schools, pupil referral units, the adoption and fostering agencies and children's homes are good or better at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Three- to five-year-olds achieve as well as those in similar local authorities. Between the ages of seven and 11, children make average progress in mathematics but above average progress in English. For the last five years, results in national tests for 11-year-olds have been consistently in line with those in similar areas. The number of 16-year-olds gaining five or more good GCSE qualifications has risen steadily over the last five years, in line with improvements elsewhere. However, the number gaining two or more good GCSE qualifications in science has been consistently lower than the averages for similar areas. Sixteen-year-olds from low-income families and those with special educational needs do less well than others of the same age. The gaps in performance are widening. At the age of 16, Asian and Asian British pupils perform less well than others of the same age. At secondary level, behaviour is good or better in the very large majority of schools and absence rates are lower than elsewhere.

The large majority of services are good or better at encouraging children and young people to take part in activities that will be of benefit to themselves and the community. However, the academy is only satisfactory, as are too many of the childminders and independent special schools. Improvements include a reduction in the number of young people who say they have taken drugs or been drunk and a fall in the number of young people caught breaking the law for the first time. However,

the number of young people caught breaking the law more than once has risen and is now higher than the average across the country.

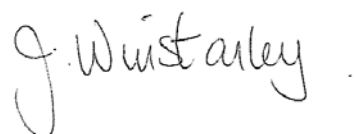
Almost all types of providers are good or better at helping young people gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications needed to get a job. However, the private and voluntary children's homes have more satisfactory provision in this respect. The academy is also only satisfactory. The latest information shows that the proportion of low-income families, who take-up their entitlement to childcare so that they can work, has risen steadily and now approximately a fifth do so. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education or training is in line with similar local authorities but has changed very little over the last three years. The number of young people who continue with their education or who take-up work or training is in line with the average for similar local authorities. There has been a steady increase in the number of 19-year-olds who achieve the equivalent of five good GCSE passes. The same is true of young people of that age who gain two A levels or the equivalent.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority has succeeded in maintaining its good performance. It has also been effective in bringing about necessary improvements, particularly in its safeguarding arrangements. The 'targeted areas for attention' in the Children and Young People's Plan focus on the correct priorities and have been effective, for example in increasing the number of mothers attending clinics, in reducing the amount of substance misuse and in increasing the number of 19-year-olds gaining two A levels or equivalent. The local authority's strategies for closing an inadequate school and opening a sixth form college reflect a clear readiness to make controversial decisions and redistribute resources in order to tackle underperformance.

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 cursive script, reading "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment