

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 7421 6666
Direct F 020 7421 5633
Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Damian Allen
Executive Director of Children and Family Services
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
6th Floor, Municipal Building
Archway Road
Huyton
Liverpool L36 9UX

Dear Mr Allen

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.

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. This good performance has been sustained with further improvements since 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and most provision effectively helps children and young people to learn and to stay safe. Secondary education has been reorganised and secondary schools and secondary sixth forms were replaced in the academic year 2009/2010 with seven new learning centres. There are currently no academies. Main strengths and areas for development remain similar to last year with some significant improvement in early years and childcare provision.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found two main strengths, several areas that meet requirements and two areas for development. Previous concerns and one priority action identified in an inspection in 2009 have been addressed. A full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in 2010 judged both aspects to be good with outstanding features.

Strengths

- The very large majority of provision for very young children and those of primary school age is judged good or outstanding and this shows sustained performance since 2010. The four children's centres inspected for the first time this year are judged good or outstanding.
- The attainment of very young children from all backgrounds is better than children in similar areas and nationally at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and improvement in this area has been consistent over four years. The local authority has prioritised work in this area. The gap in achievement between young children from low-income families and all other young children of the same age has narrowed over three years and is better than in similar areas.
- Provisional data for 2011 show that standards in national tests at the age of 11 continue to build on the improvements of 2010 when performance was in line with similar areas and the national average. Girls continue to out perform boys.
- From a low base, the proportion of 16 and 19-year-olds attaining at least five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, level 2 and level 3 qualifications continues to improve year on year. In 2011, three learning centres were judged to be good. The one centre judged inadequate in 2010 is making satisfactory progress and monitoring reports state it is benefitting from good local authority support.

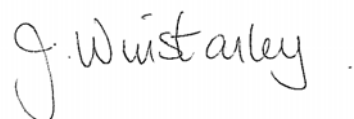
- All post-16 provision is now good, an improvement on last year as two secondary sixth forms previously graded satisfactory have recently been judged to be good. Although more young people between 16- and 17-years-old are not in education, employment or training than in similar areas, good progress is being made and this figure continues to reduce steadily year on year.
- Six of the eight maintained special schools and special sixth forms are judged outstanding, one is good and the pupil referral unit is also good which shows improvement since 2010. One maintained special school is judged satisfactory.
- All of the children's homes managed by Knowsley are good or better as are the children's homes commissioned by the local authority. The one local authority home that was judged satisfactory is temporarily closed.
- As in 2010, the local authority fostering agency is judged good and the adoption agency inspected earlier this year remains satisfactory.

Areas for further improvement

- Too few centres for learning are judged good or better. The overall effectiveness of three of the recently established learning centres continues to be satisfactory and one is inadequate. Secondary school persistent absence is higher than in similar areas though local authority data illustrates improved attendance in the 2011 spring and summer terms.
- Although improving, educational standards continue to be below average for 16- and 19-year olds. The proportion of 16-year-olds who achieve at least five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, continues to be well below the national average. Provisional data for 2011 show standards for those aged 16 are continuing to rise but remain below those in similar areas and nationally. Also, the gap in achievement between 16-year-olds from low-income families or young people who have special educational needs and all other children of the same age has widened significantly in 2010, to just above that of similar areas and the national average. Although good progress has been made in the number of 19-year-olds gaining level 2 qualifications, fewer than elsewhere go on to achieve higher level 3 qualifications.

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 that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley

Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment