

9 December 2010

Ms Janet Donaldson
Group Director of Children and Young People's Services
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Northgate House, Northgate
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Dear Ms Donaldson

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 along does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council perform poorly.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in July 2009 found two areas for priority action, which limited the 2009 children's services assessment to adequate. A subsequent inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children in January 2010 reported that the overall effectiveness of services to ensure children and young people were safe was inadequate.

The majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Special schools and the pupil referral unit perform well as do many primary schools and childcare settings. However, childminders, secondary schools and the further education college are not doing as well and there are three inadequate school sixth forms. The local adoption agency and all the children's homes for those in care are good and the local fostering agency is satisfactory.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests for 11-year-olds in 2009 went down but were still better than results elsewhere. Examination results for young people aged 16 are similar to those of their peers elsewhere. However, at this age, young people from low-income families or with special educational needs do not do as well. Consequently, the gaps in their achievement and that of their peers have widened over time. Nineteen-year-olds, including those from low-income families in Calderdale achieve roughly the same number of qualifications as those from similar backgrounds across the country and the latest results show a slight improvement.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of safeguarding.
- Improve the quality of school sixth forms.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. Ofsted's inspections of services and settings confirm this. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than elsewhere. There is good local knowledge of how many mothers are still breast-feeding their babies after six weeks, although fewer mothers than found nationally are doing so and this number continues to go down. The rate of screening for Chlamydia is below that found nationally. There are fewer children who are too overweight at the ages of five and 11 than elsewhere, although at both ages

the number rose in 2009. Below average numbers of children than nationally take part in sport regularly. The number of young people who say they have recently been drunk or taken drugs is the same as in similar areas but this number has reduced at a better rate than elsewhere. Parents say they are pleased with services for their disabled children. Local arrangements for children and young people who have mental health or emotional difficulties have improved and children in care receive good support from the specialist health team.

The inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found a number of serious weaknesses. These included the variable quality of initial and full assessments and some poor case work practice. For example, case recording was a serious weakness, partly because of failings in the electronic recording system. Some positive aspects of practice were seen, including good joint working to protect children at risk of sexual exploitation. The local authority reports some recent good progress in improving staffing levels. Recent data show better performance than found nationally in the number of times that children in care have to change placements. Ofsted's inspections show that arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in most schools. Until 2008, the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents was not reducing fast enough. However, the local authority has reported a very good reduction in 2009. Although similar to numbers elsewhere, the number of children and young people who are admitted to hospital as a result of accidental or deliberate injury has increased considerably since 2005.

Almost all types of services and settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The further education college is less successful and a recent monitoring visit found that it was making insufficient progress in improving success rates for 16- to 18-year-olds and adults. At the end of their Reception Year in school, children achieve at a similar level to their peers elsewhere but performance is not improving over time. At the age of 11, results prior to 2009 show children achieving well; there was a significant drop in 2009 and too few children took the national tests to provide a figure in 2010. By the age of 16, half of young people gain five or more good GCSEs. A small number of primary and secondary schools are not reaching the expected standards. Behaviour is not good in enough secondary schools. Although the trend of improvement in looked after children's educational attainment dipped in English at Key Stage 2, and in the proportion of 16-year-olds attaining five or more GCSEs in 2009, outcomes still remain higher than the national average.

Almost all services and settings are good at involving young people in decision making and activity in their communities. The inspection of safeguarding and looked after children reported that there was regular consultation, including with the Disabled Youth Forum, Gay and Lesbian Youth in Calderdale and Voice4U – the children in care council. Re-offending rates for young people in Calderdale are better than in similar areas and, by most measures, the youth offending service works well. Latest figures show a substantial reduction in the number of young people caught committing an offence for the first time. However, the numbers who receive a custodial sentence has gone up and performance is not as good as in similar areas.

Over time there have been good improvements in the number of young people who offend who are in education, training or work and the numbers who have a suitable place to live have also improved significantly.

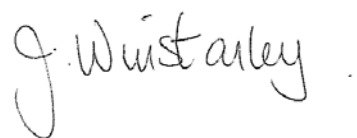
There is mixed performance in the support that services and settings give children and young people to prepare them for future education, training or work. Special schools and the pupil referral unit are particularly good at this but provision is not as strong in the local fostering agency. The most recent available data show the number of 17-year-olds in school, college or other form of training has continued to rise. However, in recent years, there has been a rise in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training. A high and increasing number of families on low incomes make use of the funding available for childcare. Recent data show improvements in the number of care leavers in education, work or training and, particularly, in the rise in the number who are given a suitable place to live when they leave care.

Prospects for improvement

The Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children reported that, despite some recent action, the pace of change had been slow in addressing known areas of weakness and found poor performance in social care fieldwork teams and in management support for staff. Performance management systems in social care were inadequate. More positively, it found a culture of openness and a willingness to accept external challenge. It also found there were some positive local partnerships, notably with health, but that these were not consistently good. Capacity for improvement was judged to be adequate. The local authority has a government Improvement Notice in place until March 2012 with a focus on the quality of children's social care. The Improvement Board, which was in place prior to the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children, has met regularly and the local authority is firmly and proactively committed to improving its services for safeguarding. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is providing at least satisfactory support to help them get better. The Youth Justice Board has judged that the youth offending team is performing excellently against the national indicators and has good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance.

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