

9 December 2009

Ms Joyce Thacker
Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
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Dear Ms Thacker

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

Children's services rating	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council perform poorly.

The overall effectiveness of only a small minority of inspected services, settings and institutions is good or better and there are significant weaknesses in the front-line delivery of social care. The recent unannounced inspection of its contact, referral and assessment arrangements noted three areas for priority action which are of sufficient concern that the safety of children cannot be assured. Consequently the findings of this inspection limit the rating of children's services in Rotherham to performs poorly.

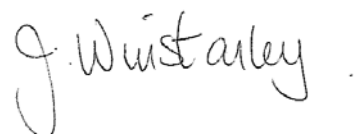
The local authority's adoption service is good and both local authority and private fostering are adequate. Of the six children's homes in the borough, four are adequate and two are good. However, this level of good performance is below that found in similar areas and nationally. The local authority has taken steps to address weaknesses identified in the management of serious case reviews and those carried out most recently were judged to have been conducted adequately or well.

The overall effectiveness of childminders and childcare providers is below that found in similar areas and nationally. Performance in nursery schools is much better. The proportion of good or better primary schools is similar to that found elsewhere while secondary schools perform just below comparators. Provision for children attending special schools is often better than in similar areas and that found nationally with four out of the six schools in the borough being outstanding. Inspection shows the proportion of good pupil referral units is smaller than is found in similar areas and nationally. Judgements for staying safe in inspected services are good or better in only a minority of provision and services.

Performance against the large majority of national indicators is at least in line with similar areas and national figures. For staying safe this is true for the very large majority of indicators but outcomes are not as strong for enjoying and achieving. There are particular weaknesses in relation to health, the completion of social care assessments, educational achievement at the age of 11 and low levels of achievement at the age of 19. The achievement gaps for groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable remain too wide in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at the end of primary school.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA