

9 December 2010

Mr Michael Jameson
Assistant Executive Director Children and Young People
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Level 10 Civic Centre, West Street
Oldham OL1 1XJ

Dear Mr Jameson

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 in, 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.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council perform excellently.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Provision in the further education and sixth form colleges is very good, as is much of that in special schools, pupil referral units, children's homes and fostering and adoption services. In nursery, primary and secondary schools it is good overall. However, a half of childminders and a third of childcare providers are no better than satisfactory.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found no areas for priority action.

National performance indicators show that the very large majority of 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 perform as well as their contemporaries in similar areas and across the country. Sixteen-year-olds who receive free school meals do less well than others of the same age and while the gap in performance between the two groups widened in 2009, unvalidated data for 2010 shows improvement. At primary and secondary levels, young people with special educational needs are catching up slightly with others of the same age. At the ages of 11 and 16, pupils of Asian and Asian British heritage performed considerably less well than the rest of the school population in 2009, but again the latest unvalidated data shows improvement in 2010. The proportion of 16- to 18-year olds not in education, employment or training continues to be lower than in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve early years and childcare provision so that more of it is good or better.
- Continue to improve the attainment of children and young people who receive free school meals and those from Asian and Asian British backgrounds to narrow the gap between them and others of the same age

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services are good or better at encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives. Outcomes are generally in line with, or above, those for England and for similar areas. Improvements include a reduction in the numbers of five-year-olds and 11-year-olds who are very overweight and more children and young people take part in physical activities and sport. However, the

proportion of mothers who breast-feed their children is below the national average. The emotional and behavioural health of children in care, based on the average score from primary carer questionnaires, was below the national average in 2009 but the most recent data show that, since then, it has improved to be in line with that average.

The very large majority of schools and children's homes are good or better at keeping children safe. The same is true of most other services, apart from childminders and private and voluntary fostering and adoption agencies, where around a half are no better than satisfactory. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services highlighted the good communication and collaboration between agencies; the very high proportion of initial and core assessments of children's social care needs completed on time; and the care taken to ensure that children and young people were properly safeguarded and received the appropriate services. Most outcomes are in line with or above those in other areas. Improvements include reductions in the proportion of children who have been bullied and in the number of injured children who have to be admitted to hospital. Children in care have to move home less frequently. However, there has been an increase in the number of children who become the subject of a protection plan more than once.

The large majority of schools, childcare providers and fostering agencies and all the special schools, pupil referral units and children's homes inspected, are good or better at helping children to do well and enjoy their learning. Here again, childminders are no better than adequate overall. Over the last four years, the achievement of three- to five-year olds has improved in line with that in similar areas. Results in national tests show that the proportion of 11-year-olds achieving the expected levels in both English and mathematics is in line with averages in similar local authorities, as it has been for the last five years. At GCSE, the number gaining five or more good passes, including English and mathematics, continues to rise, in line with similar areas. The same is true of the number achieving two or more good GCSE passes in science. Entries for A level mathematics and chemistry have increased over the last two years. Sixteen-year-olds who receive free schools meals achieve less well than others of the same age and the gap in performance between the two groups widened in 2009. However, unvalidated data shows improvement in 2010. At the ages of 11 and 16, pupils of Asian and Asian British heritage performed considerably less well than the rest of the school population in 2009, but again the latest unvalidated data shows improvement in 2010

The percentage of children and young people who take part in activities which will enrich their own and others' lives has risen considerably and is now above the average for similar areas. This reflects the high level of provision made by the large majority of settings. Improvements include a further reduction in teenage pregnancies and fewer young people getting drunk or taking drugs. The number of young people caught breaking the law more than once is higher than in similar areas but, in most respects, the youth offending service performs adequately.

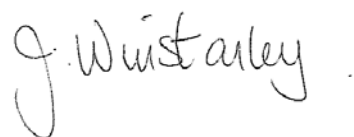
Special schools, the pupil referral unit and the sixth form college all make good or outstanding provision to help children and young people develop the knowledge and skills needed to gain a job. The same is true of the local authority's fostering agency and the large majority of children's homes. However, inspection reports show that, overall, primary and secondary schools are only satisfactory in this respect. The proportion of low-income families who take up their entitlement to childcare so that they can work has increased to a fifth. As in previous years, the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training is lower than in similar areas. The number of 19-year-olds with the equivalent of five or more good GCSEs has increased steadily over the last five years, as has the number in that age group who have two A levels or the equivalent.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority has succeeded in improving its previously good performance. This reflects the detailed attention that officers and elected members have given to analysing the strengths and weaknesses in provision. The updated Children and Young People's Plan identifies relevant priorities for improvement. These focus not only on tackling underperformance but also on making further improvements in areas where provision and outcomes are satisfactory or better. The plan also includes details of how the local authority intends to buy services from a range of agencies, in order to provide the resources necessary to support further improvement.

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 style with a large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment