

9 December 2009

Mr Trevor Doughty
Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

Dear Mr Doughty

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

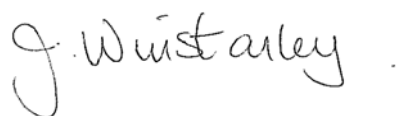
Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Northumberland County Council perform well.

A higher than average proportion of both primary and secondary schools, including the schools' sixth forms, is good or outstanding and a very small number, currently four schools, have been judged to be inadequate. Childminder and childcare settings are good. Most nurseries are also good or better, although the proportion is smaller than that of similar areas. All special schools are at least good, as is the pupil referral unit. These schools are particularly good at promoting healthy lifestyles for young people in their care and ensuring that they achieve as much as possible. Performance of the council's fostering and adoption agencies is good. All five children's homes are good, especially in the way they help young people make a positive contribution to the running of the home.

Performance against a very large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is at least in line with similar areas and performance nationally. However, there is a weakness in the educational achievement of pupils at age 11 with results below similar areas and just below the national average. The difference in the performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age is still too wide. For example, the gap between pupils who receive free school meals and all pupils in Northumberland is wider than the national gap. The very large majority of 17-year-olds continue in education or training, and the number of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training has been successfully reduced and is now matching the national average. However, a smaller proportion of care leavers than in similar areas and found nationally have access to suitable accommodation and are in education, employment or training.

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.

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

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA