

9 December 2010

Mr John Collings
Executive Director of Children's Services
Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council
Civic Centre
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8PU

Dear Mr Collings

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

Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council perform well.

In 2009, a transitional year, children's services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne performed adequately. Since then, improvement has been significant, particularly in the four local authority children's homes, with all now at least satisfactory. One is outstanding. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Importantly, there are very few inadequate settings and some key provision is outstanding, such as three of the five local authority special schools and the general further education and tertiary college. Early years settings, primary and secondary schools are mostly good. The pupil referral unit is also good. The independent specialist college is satisfactory. The local fostering and adoption agencies are good.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

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. Children progress well at school and results for 11- and 16-year-olds are in line with similar areas. Educational outcomes for children and young people from low-income families are also improving but more needs to be done to raise the achievement of these young people further, especially at the end of their secondary schooling. Behaviour in secondary schools is good, but absence rates, although reducing, are still above average. In recent years, there has been a steady reduction in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in work, education or training.

Key areas for further development

- Improve attendance rates in secondary schools.
- Improve outcomes at the age of 16 for young people from low-income families.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are successful, except for two key areas. The local authority recognises that too many children are overweight and the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant, although reducing, is still too high. These two issues are already identified as key priorities in the 2010-2011 Children and Young People's Plan. Nearly all schools, the pupil referral unit and the colleges are good at promoting healthy lifestyles. Childminders and the children's homes also do well. Performance on the effectiveness of the child and adolescent mental health services remains good. Other

improvements include: the increasing number of mothers who breast-feed; more children having school lunches; and children in care being positive about their feelings, behaviour and friendships. The local authority is successfully reducing the number of 16-year-olds who drink or take drugs.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good. Ofsted's inspections of early years settings, schools and colleges confirm this. A key priority of the Children and Young People's Plan, to support children, young people and families early before their needs escalate, has been successful. Local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services reported that the local authority's response to issues was prompt and timely action was taken to ensure children's safety. Assessments are done on time and inspections show that their quality is being monitored and improved. Arrangements to ensure that children are safe within the community are given high priority. For example, the local authority is continuing to support initiatives to ensure that fewer children feel bullied and to reduce the number who are killed or seriously injured on the roads. However, the number of children and young people who are admitted to hospital because they are injured either accidentally or deliberately remains above the average for England. The weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements identified in some local authority children's homes have been remedied and all are now at least satisfactory.

Child carers, nurseries, primary and secondary schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Provision is also good in the special schools, the pupil referral unit and the college. Provision is more adequate than good in some children's homes and in the independent specialist college. The local authority supports schools causing concern effectively. The number of schools not reaching the expected minimum standards is reducing. The overall trend in results at the age of 11 and 16 is one of steady year-on-year improvement and young people in Newcastle do as well as in similar areas. However, the number of secondary school pupils who are often absent from school is too high. The local authority has rightly recognised the need to improve further the outcomes for children from low-income families because their achievement remains below their peers, especially for 16-year-olds. Recent data, yet to be validated, show that children and young people with special educational needs do as well as similar groups nationally.

Almost all settings, schools and colleges are good or outstanding at ensuring that children and young people participate fully in decisions about their schools and the local area. The local authority has responded to children and young people's views by using their suggestions and the concerns they have raised to develop policy and improve services further. For example, young people wanted help to ensure that the general public had a better image of them. They worked with the local area on this and contributed to the development of *"My Place"*, a world-class city centre youth facility. A core of young people does not contribute as positively as the rest and this is a concern for Newcastle. The local authority has taken robust action to reduce the number of permanent exclusions and, in specific localities, it provides more interesting activities as suggested by the young people themselves. Most recent data

show that permanent exclusions are now rare thanks to early identification of potential issues and good prevention work between the local authority and schools. An inspection of the youth offending service reported that, last year, an above average number of young people than in similar areas were breaking the law and an insufficient number of those who offended were in work, education or training. The youth offending team was judged to be working well and the number of young people who offend is reducing.

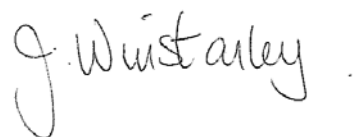
The local authority has strengthened actions to address its priorities of tackling child poverty, increasing the proportion of young people in work, education or training and increasing the number going on to higher education. These actions have had a positive impact. More 17-year-olds than in similar areas are in education or training and more young people than in previous years are gaining good qualifications by the age of 19, including those from low-income backgrounds. The local authority's work to tackle child poverty has been recognised as innovative, however, disadvantaged families still need more help to access funding for childcare. The schools and colleges inspected prepare young people well for life after school, including those with severe learning difficulties. The independent specialist college for pupils with complex needs has made significant progress in providing opportunities to widen young people's horizons. An Ofsted survey of youth support services reported that neighbourhood youth projects engage well with young people living in areas where poverty is high.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority's accurate review of progress against priorities and the robust analysis of areas of underperformance show good prospects for future improvement. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that the local authority was already working on areas for improvement because they were known. Support is targeted where it matters most. This is demonstrated well through the most recent Children and Young People's Plan. Outcomes for children and young people have improved over time and significantly so in some important areas, such as safeguarding and results in examinations. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools and to the children's homes show that the local authority has done a lot of work to improve provision. Limited resources are allocated efficiently to reduce inequalities. The local authority is developing its ability to meet needs through better use of funding and pooling of knowledge at local level.

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, reading "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment