

9 December 2010

Ms Pauline Newman
Director of Children's Services
Manchester City Council
PO Box 536
Town Hall Extension
Manchester M60 2AF

Dear Ms Newman

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.

Manchester City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
---------------------------------------	--------------------------------

Children's services in Manchester City Council perform adequately.

The majority of inspected services, settings and institutions are good or better. The further education and sixth form colleges are outstanding, as is one of the two academies inspected. The large majority of primary and special schools are good or better. There are no inadequate secondary schools but over half of them are only satisfactory. Provision for very young children continues to be mixed, with equal numbers of outstanding and inadequate providers. Two thirds of fostering and adoption provision is only satisfactory.

An unannounced inspection of front-line services carried out in November 2009 identified several strengths, including robust scrutiny of contacts, effective initial screening of referrals and systematic performance monitoring at strategic and operational levels. However, it also identified the need to improve the quality of initial and core assessments and the systems for recording them. Of the three serious case reviews conducted over the last years, two were good and one was outstanding.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. In national tests, 11-year-olds achieve as well as their peers elsewhere. The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five or more good GCSE passes is also in line with the average in similar authorities. However, over the last five years, 16-year-olds who receive free school meals, and those who have special educational needs, have been falling increasingly behind others of the same age. Absence from secondary schools remains higher than in similar areas and improvements have been slower than elsewhere. The proportion of teenage girls who become pregnant continues to be amongst the highest nationally. Despite recent improvements, the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is still worse than in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools, so that more of them are good or better and absence rates are reduced.
- Raise the achievement of 16-year-olds who receive free school meals, or who have special education needs, so that their performance is closer to that of others of the same age.
- Reduce teenage pregnancies at a faster rate.
- Reduce the number of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of schools and children's homes are good or better at encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives. However, a smaller proportion of childminders and providers of childcare are good or better in this respect. The local authority's fostering agency and the fostering and adoption services provided by private and voluntary agencies are satisfactory overall in this respect. Outcomes are generally in line with those elsewhere. The take-up of school lunches at secondary level is higher than in similar areas and the proportion of mothers who breast-feed their children has risen to be in line with the national average. However, the proportion of five-year-olds who are very overweight has risen and is now worse than in similar areas.

The large majority of schools, and the very large majority of children's homes, are good or better at keeping children and young people safe. However, around a half of childminders are no better than satisfactory at this. The majority of outcomes are in line with those elsewhere. Improvements include: a fall in the proportion of children who have been bullied; a reduction in the number of injured children who have to be admitted to hospital; a considerable reduction in the proportion of children who become the subject of a child protection plan for a second time; and a reduction in the number of times that children in care have to move home. More initial assessments but fewer core assessments of children's social care needs are being completed on time. This was highlighted in the recent unannounced inspection which attributed it to staffing shortages. It is taking longer to arrange adoptions and, although the proportion of children in care cases reviewed on time has increased, it is below the national average.

The large majority of primary schools are good or better at helping children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. Secondary schools are less effective, with around a half being no better than satisfactory. The picture is similar for childminders and childcare providers. Provision is best in the academies, sixth form colleges and children's homes. Over the last four years, the achievement of three- to five-year-olds has improved and is now higher than the average in similar areas. The achievement of 11-year-olds has also improved but at a slower rate and is now in line with the average for similar authorities. Children in care tend to do better than those in care elsewhere, although they still do not perform as well as others of their age. The number of 16-year-olds gaining good GCSE passes in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, has improved in line with performance in similar areas. Over the last five years, 16-year-olds who receive free school meals, and those who have special educational needs, have been falling increasingly behind others of the same age. In the large majority of secondary schools, behaviour is good or better. However, persistent absence from secondary schools is a major weakness. Despite the extra time and resources given to tackling the problem, improvements have been slower than elsewhere. As a result, the authority is now further below similar authorities than it was four years ago.

The majority of services and settings provide good or very good opportunities for children and young people to take part in activities which will benefit themselves and others. Schools and children's homes are particularly good at this. Teenage pregnancy rates are the second highest nationally and little progress has been made in reducing them. The number of children and young people who say they have taken drugs or been drunk in the last year has increased and is now worse than in similar areas. However, more young offenders are continuing with their education or taking up work and the number living in suitable accommodation has risen. The number of young people caught breaking the law more than once is higher than in similar areas. In most aspects, the youth offending service works reasonably well.

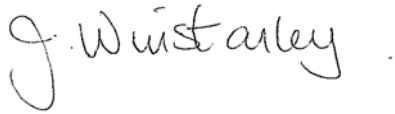
Only half of primary schools and just over a third of secondary schools and pupil referral units are good or better at helping children and young people acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to gain a job. The special schools, sixth form colleges, academies and children's homes do better than this, with the large or very large majority of them making good or outstanding provision. The number of low income families who take up their entitlement to childcare, so that they can continue working, has increased in line with similar areas. The same is true of the number of 17-year-olds in education or training. A continuing weakness is the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training. Although the figure has improved since last year, it is still worse than in similar areas. For the last five years, the number of 19-year-olds with the equivalent of five or more good GCSE passes has risen steadily, as has the number with two A levels or the equivalent. According to the most recent figures, only three quarters of care leavers live in suitable accommodation. This is well below the national average.

Prospects for improvement

The authority's services continue to be adequate and outcomes have kept in line with averages elsewhere. Where improvements have been made, they have not been sufficient to raise performance to good. For example, unlike last year, there are no inadequate secondary schools in the authority. However, around a half are still no better than satisfactory. Similarly, although there is no inadequate fostering and adoption provision, most of it is still only satisfactory. The Children and Young People's Plan recognises the need for a further focus on those areas where there has been insufficient development and identifies clear actions to bring about improvement. A review is being conducted of the way that services are commissioned, in order to release more resources to support the planned developments. The authority's capacity to act on the results of self-evaluation is highlighted in the way that the learning from a recent serious case review has been translated into robust action by managers at all levels, and resulted in improved quality assurance processes.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment