

9 December 2010

Mr Damian Allen  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Huyton Hey Road, Huyton  
Liverpool L36 5YH

Dear Mr Allen

## 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.

## Knowsley Metropolitan Borough children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Knowsley Metropolitan Borough perform well. This shows performance that has improved since 2009.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. This includes primary schools, most special schools and the pupil referral unit. Inspections from 2009 show secondary schools to be doing well, although the recent reorganisation of these schools to seven new Centres for Learning means that only two have been inspected as new institutions in their own right. Of the two that have, one is satisfactory and one is inadequate and has a notice to improve. Too much early years and childcare provision is satisfactory. The further education college is good and the two secondary special sixth forms are outstanding. The five children's homes run by the local authority are mostly good, and one is satisfactory; the two other children's homes run by private companies are good and satisfactory respectively. The local fostering agency is good and the local authority adoption agency is satisfactory.

An inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children in February 2010 reported that both services are good. This very positive outcome followed an unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services which found one area for priority action. The local authority's work to identify and monitor children in private fostering arrangements is satisfactory.

National performance measures show the large majority of outcomes to be in line with, or above, the averages for England or for similar areas. This includes indicators for educational attainment and progress. Young children make satisfactory progress at five-years-old and, by the age of 11, most do as well in national tests as children in similar areas. Standards are improving for all pupils at this age including those who come from low-income families and those with special educational needs. Examination results for 16-year-olds, however, are still well below similar areas and the national average although steady improvements from a low base have been made over the last five years. Sixteen-year-olds from low-income families do well at this age compared to similar areas, and the gap in achievement between this group and the rest has reduced over the last three years. Fewer 19-year-olds gain good qualifications than elsewhere and the numbers not in education, work or training continue to be high, although these rates are falling swiftly and faster than similar areas.

#### Key areas for further development

- Improve childcare provision so that more is good or better.
- Improve educational outcomes for 16- to 19-year-olds.
- Reduce further the numbers of young people not in education, work or training.

### **Outcomes for children and young people**

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are mostly good and similar to 2009 outcomes, although some have not improved well enough. Most schools, colleges and children's homes are successful at this, although early years and childcare settings are less so. Services for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties continue to be good, and children report that they have good relationships with their peers, family and appropriate adults. The rates of obesity amongst primary school age children continue to be of concern and the local authority has identified this as a priority for improvement. Fewer children are satisfied with their parks and play areas than in similar authorities and the numbers taking part in good quality sports and physical education is also below average. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is reducing at a faster rate than elsewhere and fewer 16-year-olds say they have recently been drunk or taken drugs than in similar areas.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. The most recent data show the local authority's performance to be in line with the national average, although more children and young people are admitted to hospital owing to unintentional or deliberate injuries than similar areas. In most instances, however, good local services have worked well together to protect children at risk of harm. A full inspection of safeguarding confirmed this and judged the way the local authority and its partners assessed local needs and coordinated services as outstanding. A recent survey found that fewer young people say they have been bullied than elsewhere and a number of very successful local initiatives, such as 'Safer Schools', make sure anti-bullying programmes receive good support. Other successful projects to help children and young people stay safe and reduce risk of harm include safe internet use, alcohol awareness programmes and sexual health clinics.

Most settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The local authority is successful in its work to help schools get better and there is very little inadequate provision. The focus on raising standards and helping children whose circumstances make them more vulnerable has been successful in many respects. Children with special educational needs and those from low-income families generally do as well as their peers in similar areas and nationally. Achievement of children at the start of their schooling is broadly average and pupils make satisfactory progress in primary schools; at age 11 they do as well as pupils from similar areas in national tests. This is an improving picture and particularly good is their progression in mathematics. Standards at the age of 16

have improved from a very low baseline over the last three years although there are still too few gaining five or more good GCSEs which is well below similar areas. The local authority has reorganised its 11 secondary schools into seven new Centres for Learning for 11- to 16-year-olds as part of its improvement strategy. A recent inspection of one new centre was judged to be satisfactory and a second was issued a notice to improve, both reports identifying for example literacy, numeracy and attendance as areas needing improvement. The number of pupils frequently absent from secondary schools is higher than in similar areas though falling year on year. The local authority has prioritised work to reduce this. The number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools has also fallen sharply and behaviour is good in all secondary schools.

Knowsley has a good track record in helping children and young people have a say about services and provision. This has been recognised nationally and continues to be a key priority in the Children and Young People's Plan. Rates of re-offending are falling, and recent local data show these to be lower when compared to similar areas. Most young people who offend are helped to find a suitable job or enrol on to a training programme or course. An inspection in 2009 found the youth offending service to be working well and providing a good service to young people.

Although the number of all 19-year-olds getting good qualifications is below average, young people from low-income families do much better than their peers in similar authorities and they are more likely to go on to higher education as a result. The local authority is aware of the need to provide increased opportunities for the comparatively high numbers of young people who are not in education, work or training, and it has already increased the number of youth apprenticeships available. Reducing child poverty and increasing employment for all young people is central to the local authority's plans. Higher numbers of families on low incomes make use of the funding available for childcare than is the norm. Many care leavers do well in finding appropriate work or training placements and all are helped to find suitable accommodation.

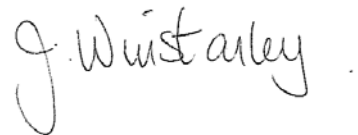
### **Prospects for improvement**

Knowsley performed adequately in 2009, but now performs well. Many good outcomes for children and young people have been maintained or improved since last year although success in improving health outcomes is mixed. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress in important areas and is clear about what further work needs to be done. High priority is placed on the needs of those children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, such as those who are in care or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The recent inspection of safeguarding judged strategic leadership and management to be outstanding and capacity to improve for both safeguarding and looked after children's services to be outstanding also. Resources have been invested successfully in strengthening child protection services

and in supporting the major reorganisation of the borough's schools. While ambitions are clear, it is too soon to measure the full impact of the new Centres for Learning on continuing to raise standards and on increasing levels of attendance.

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' and a trailing dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment