

9 December 2009

Mr Damian Allen
Executive Director of Children's Services
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Huyton Hey Road
Huyton
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Dear Mr Allen

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 adequately (2)
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Children's services in Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately. The joint area review in February 2008 judged safeguarding to be adequate and looked after children's services to be good.

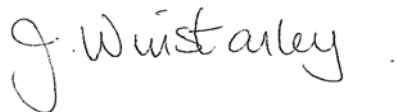
However, the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements identified a number of areas for development and one priority action: a backlog of un-assessed referrals, some of which included a possible risk of harm and evidence of poor assessment of risk. This inspection's findings have limited the rating for children's services to performs adequately.

Provision for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable demonstrates greater inconsistency. Special schools perform less well than in similar areas, although all but one are good or better and the pupil referral unit is good. Three of the five children's homes are good or better and the local authority fostering agency is also good. However, private fostering arrangements and the local authority adoption service are only satisfactory, performing below that found in similar areas and nationally.

The quality of early years provision is variable, although performance in most education settings improves as children progress through the education system. Childminders and childcare settings are good or better in just over half of the provision, although performance is well below the national average, while all but one of the boroughs nursery schools are good or outstanding. Primary and secondary schools also do very well in comparison to all other areas. School sixth forms perform better than the national average but below those in similar areas.

Performance against a large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, are mixed. The local authority's performance has deteriorated in 2008/09 with regard to the timeliness of initial and core assessments, and child protection plans lasting more than two years have been significantly higher than elsewhere since 2006/2007. The gap in achievement between children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and their peers is reducing and narrower than found in similar areas and nationally, and achievement at key Stage 4 for Asian pupils is improving and better than similar areas. Overall, however, achievement of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics level is considerably lower than the national average and the proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training is also much higher than elsewhere.

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