

9 December 2009

Mr Gerald Meehan
Strategic Director for Children and Young People
Halton Borough Council
Municipal Building
Kingsway
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 7QF

Dear Mr Meehan

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

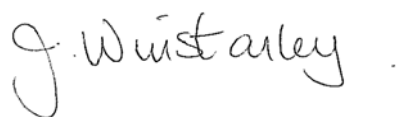
Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Halton Borough Council perform well.

A greater proportion of primary provision is better than in similar areas and the national average although there is more variable performance in childcare, nursery provision, secondary schools and school sixth forms. Nursery provision performs above the national average and childminders performance is better than in similar areas. However, in non-domestic child care settings, secondary schools and school sixth forms there is too much provision that is only satisfactory and performance is lower than in similar areas and seen nationally. Only half of secondary schools and school sixth forms are good or better. Further education which was judged to be inadequate is now making good progress. Provision for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is good overall. The joint area review in July 2008 judged safeguarding to be outstanding and provision for looked after children to be good. All special schools in the borough are outstanding or good, the two pupil referral units are good and two of the three children's homes are good and perform better than similar areas and the national average. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies provide good services in line with or above similar areas. Judgements for all Every Child Matters outcomes are good or better in a large majority of settings, although performance is less consistent in the area of achieving economic well-being.

The local authority performs well against the national indicators with the very large majority for staying safe and enjoying and achieving in line with or above national averages. The performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is in line or better than similar areas and that found nationally. Gaps in educational achievement for these children in comparison to others of the same age are narrower than elsewhere nationally. For example, there is good achievement at Key Stages 2 and for all pupils including those with special educational needs, looked after children and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, the participation of young people staying on in education at the age of 17 has reduced over time and there has been a considerable increase in the number of young people not 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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA