

9 December 2010

Ms Margaret Whellans  
Director of Learning and Children  
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council  
Learning and Children  
Civic Centre, Regent Street  
Gateshead, NE8 1HH

Dear Ms Whellans

## 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.

## Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Much provision in early years, nursery, primary and secondary schools is at least good. The general further education and tertiary college is outstanding and six of the nine school sixth forms are good or better. The pupil referral unit and the special schools are good. The local authority children's homes and the local fostering agency are also good. However, some provision is only satisfactory. This includes three school sixth forms and one special school sixth form. The local authority adoption agency is also satisfactory.

The 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 and for similar areas. Results in national tests and examinations are above similar areas for 11-year-olds and for 16-year-olds. Children with special educational needs do better at the age of 11 than others of the same age in the same areas, although, at age 16, young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families achieve less well. Attendance at secondary schools, although improving, is below similar areas. By the age of 19, results are least as good as in similar areas.

### Key areas for further development

- Reduce further persistent absence in some secondary schools.
- Improve educational outcomes at age 16 for young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families.
- Improve the school sixth forms so that all are at least good.

### Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are mostly successful. Recent improvements include better services for children with mental health needs, including those in care. Fewer children are overweight at the age of five, but obesity is still an issue for too many 11-year-olds. Teenage pregnancy and sexual health programmes are key elements of the current Children and Young People's Plan because the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant, although falling, remains high. The proportion of 16-year-olds who report that they have recently been drunk or taken drugs is also higher

than in similar areas. This is a concern in specific hotspots and *Operation Stay Safe* identified in the Children and Young People's Plan is yet to have a full impact.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good. Ofsted inspections of schools and early years settings confirm this. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that various family support programmes work intensively with the most disadvantaged families. Initiatives such as *Team around the Family* and children's centres ensure that local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm. Staff use a common approach effectively to assess and meet children's needs. The *Sahara Project*, a regional initiative, improves the recruitment of families to care for children from minority ethnic communities. The inspection of the youth offending service judged that some safeguarding practices required improvement. A robust improvement plan is in place and a number of new policies and processes have been developed. A re-inspection of the service is due in December 2010. Arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community require renewed focus. For example, the Anti-Bullying Strategy has been delayed and more children than in similar areas feel that they are experiencing bullying. The proportion of children admitted to hospital for unintentional or deliberate injuries is above average.

Child carers, schools and the general further education and tertiary college are good at helping children and young people do well and enjoy their learning. The local authority is successful in its work to improve all schools and very few are below the minimum expected levels for pupil performance. For example, a school placed in special measures just over three years ago has now been given an outstanding grade following its re-inspection. Overall, post-16 provision is good, although in some school sixth forms the rate of students' progress requires improvement. In the special school sixth form, attention is required to ensure that the sixth form curriculum fully meets the students' learning needs. Standards in primary and secondary schools have risen and results are better than in similar areas. Behaviour is good in secondary schools. The proportion of secondary school pupils who are often absent from school is above average. However, recent data show improvement. Specific projects, targeted at schools with high absence levels, are having a positive impact. A robust review has been undertaken to support specific local communities and improve further the outcomes of children who do not do as well as others. This includes children and young people from minority ethnic groups, children from low-income families and those with special educational needs.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for a long time and are effective. Schools and other settings are good at involving young people in making decisions and participating in positive activities in their communities. Exclusion from school is avoided as much as possible and rates of permanent exclusion are average. A range of interventions are in place to prevent young people from offending. Almost all those who do, are in work, education or training and have access to suitable accommodation. However, a recent inspection of the youth offending service identified the need for substantial improvement in safeguarding young people who offend and improving the work to minimise the risk of harm to others. The 2009–2010 review of the Children and

Young People's Plan indicates that the youth offending service has been integrated within local area teams in order to improve performance, target specific areas and offer better quality programmes for those at risk of offending. The local authority is ensuring that disabled children and young people, including those with complex communication needs, can influence the quality of the services they receive.

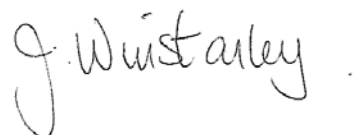
In its plans, the local authority has focused on ensuring that all young people, particularly those from low-income families, do as well as they can by the age of 19. Outcomes are at least in line with similar areas by that age. The number of young people who are not in education, work or training is reducing and matches similar authorities. This proportion, however, is still above the national figure and is a key priority for improvement within a challenging economic context. Strategies to reduce inequalities in achievement have had a positive impact. For example, young people leaving care have access to good accommodation and most are in education, work or training. The general further education and tertiary college and most schools prepare young people well for life after school. In the 2009–2010 review of the Children and Young People's Plan, the local authority and its partners have made a commitment to support local businesses through the current economic climate so that young people have more opportunities to access apprenticeships.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Outcomes for children and young people in Gateshead are good and improving. Effective leadership across a range of children's services is confirmed by inspection. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan is realistic and the analysis of what needs to be done, especially to promote equality and access for all, is robust. There are good partnerships with the local communities, for example the Jewish community. Projects are enhancing the local authority's ability to resource current initiatives and plan for future developments. The inspection of front-line child protection services found good leadership and management with team leaders managing workloads effectively and fairly at times of pressure.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment