

9 December 2009

Mr Mark Wyatt
Director of Children's Services
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

Dear Mr Wyatt

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)
-----------------------------------	--------------------------

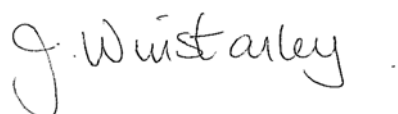
Children's services in Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The overall effectiveness of the majority of inspected and regulated services and settings in Dudley is good or better. Children receive a strong start in care and education through good early years provision which compares favourably with similar areas and that found nationally. However, their progress is hindered through uneven primary school provision where, despite some improvement, under half of primary schools are judged to be good or better in inspection. By secondary education this provision has improved, with two thirds of schools judged good or better; a trend that is sustained in the sixth form college and further education settings. Judgements for staying safe and enjoying and achieving are in line with or above similar areas and that found nationally across almost all inspected and regulated services.

The quality of provision for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is mixed, with some examples of high quality performance in education and care settings. All but one of the seven special schools and two of the four pupil referral units are good or better, with the remainder being satisfactory. Three of the authority's five children's homes were judged to be outstanding and two good at their most recent inspection. The local authority adoption service was judged to be good. However, the local authority fostering service is adequate and the private fostering arrangements inadequate.

Performance against the large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is comparable with that in similar areas and performance nationally. The gap in achievement between children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and their peers is variable and shows no consistent trend.

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, reading "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA