

9 December 2010

Ms Eleni Ioannides
Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Athenaeum House, Market Street
Bury BL9 0BN

Dear Ms Ioannides

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.

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

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

The large majority of settings, services and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Provision is outstanding in the special schools and the sixth form and further education colleges. In the pupil referral units it is good, as is most of the provision in nursery, primary and secondary schools. However, of the childcare providers inspected, more than half are only satisfactory. Childminders are slightly better than this, although three are inadequate. The adoption service, provided by private and voluntary agencies, is good, but the local authority's own adoption and fostering services are only satisfactory. Of the five private and voluntary children's homes inspected, four are good or better but one is inadequate.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified some areas for development but no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of educational outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England and for similar areas. In national tests, 11-year-olds perform as well as their peers elsewhere. The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining two or more GCSE qualifications, including mathematics and English, is above the average for similar areas. However, those with special educational needs are falling increasingly behind others of the same age. The figure for 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training is in line with the average for similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve childcare provision so that more of it is good or better.
- Improve the local authority's adoption and fostering services so that they are at least good.
- Raise the achievement of 16-year-olds with special education needs so that there is less of a gap between their performance and that of others of the same age.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are, in the very large majority of cases, very successful. The local authority's fostering agency, the children's homes, sixth form providers and special schools are all good or better at this, as are nearly all the primary and secondary schools. However, childminders and childcare providers have more satisfactory provision and the boarding school is only satisfactory. There has been a rise in the number of five- and

eleven-year-olds who are very overweight and a decline in the number of children and young people taking part in PE and sport. However, performance in these areas is still in line with the national average. The same is true of all other outcomes relating to healthy living, with the exception of children's emotional health where outcomes are better than elsewhere.

Almost all primary schools and children's homes and all the secondary and special schools and sixth form providers are good or better at keeping children and young people safe. The private and voluntary adoption agency inspected is also good at this. A majority of childminders are good or better. However, too many are no better than satisfactory. This is also the case for some childcare providers, the local authority adoption and fostering agencies and the boarding school. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line services highlighted the good partnership between the police and the advice and assessment service in dealing with domestic abuse. However, it also found that core assessments were of variable quality and there were delays in completing documentation after assessments had taken place. The proportion of children who have been bullied has fallen and the number of case reviews completed on time has improved. However, more children are becoming the subject of a child protection plan more than once. The number of times children in care have to move home has increased and fewer of them have spent two or more years with the same family.

The very large majority of primary and secondary schools and all the sixth form providers, special schools and pupil referral units are good or better at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. This is also true of the local authority's adoption and fostering agencies and the children's homes. For the last five years, three- to five-year-olds have achieved less well than those in similar authorities. However, the performance of 11-year-olds is better and has been consistently in line with that in similar areas. Sixteen-year-olds perform even better; the number gaining two or more GCSE qualifications, including mathematics and English, continues to rise and has been above average for the last three years. The proportion gaining two or more GCSE science qualifications has fluctuated but is in line with the average in similar authorities. However, the gap between the performance of secondary school students with special needs and others of the same age continues to widen and is greater than elsewhere. Standards of behaviour are good or better in almost all secondary schools and the number of 11- to 16-year-olds who are often absent from school has fallen. In their most recent inspections, two primary schools were given a notice to improve and a third was placed in special measures. Monitoring reports show that the authority is providing these schools with good support to help them to improve.

The great majority of the services inspected make good or better provision to encourage children and young people to take part in positive activities which will be of benefit to themselves and the community. Despite this, the number taking part in such activities has fallen below the average for similar areas. The reduction in teenage pregnancies has slowed down and there has been a slight increase in the number of young people who say that they have taken drugs or been drunk, although these outcomes are still in line with averages elsewhere. Fewer young

people in Bury are caught breaking the law than in similar areas and, in most respects, the youth offending service works well.

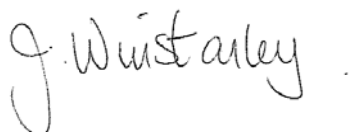
The great majority of schools and colleges give good or better support to enable young people to develop the skills, knowledge and qualifications needed to gain a job. However, half the pupil referral units, children's homes and the local authority's fostering agency are no better than satisfactory in this respect. Over a quarter of low-income families are taking advantage of the childcare to which they are entitled, so that they can work. Despite a slight increase, the number of 17-year-olds in education or training remains below the average for similar areas. However the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training continues to fall. The clearest improvement has been the rise in the number of care leavers continuing in education or moving into jobs or further training. This figure is now higher than the national average. The number of 19-year-olds who have the equivalent of five good GCSE passes has risen in line with averages elsewhere. The same is true of 19-year-olds with two A levels or their equivalent.

Prospects for improvement

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council continues to perform well and to make good use of its resources to support developments. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan is detailed and the local authority has identified clear and appropriate priorities and cross-cutting themes for further development over the next year. These include, for example, a focus on closing the gap between the educational performance of children and young people from low-income families and that of their contemporaries. Each key priority is supported by a detailed action plan. The local authority's focus on 'efficiencies' and the 'capital programme' is designed to ensure that its planned actions continue to be resourced properly.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment