

9 December 2010

Mrs Margaret Asquith
Director of Children's Services
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Paderborn House, Civic Centre
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Dear Mrs Asquith

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:

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|---|----------------------|---|
| 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.

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs adequately (2) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|

Children's services in Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately. In 2009, a transitional year, children's services were judged to be performing well. However, in 2010, there is not enough good universal provision to meet the requirements for that grade. In 2010, changes to the assessment process and performance profile do not allow for like-with-like comparison in some aspects. The assessment of performs adequately does not mean that the quality of provision is deteriorating overall.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The strongest provision is in special schools, pupil referral units, the fostering and adoption services and children's homes. The large majority of these make good or better provision to support the specific needs of particular groups of children. However, the provision which affects all children and young people is more variable. The large majority of nursery and primary schools are good or better. However, of the early years and childcare providers inspected, only just over a half perform this well. Of the secondary schools inspected, fewer than half are good and two are inadequate. None of the provision at this level is outstanding. The same is true at post-16 level. Of the seven providers inspected, four are good and three are satisfactory.

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

National performance measures show that the large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England and for similar areas. The most recent national test results show that 11- and 16-year-olds perform as well as their contemporaries in similar areas. Although attainment gaps between those who are eligible to receive free school meals and others are generally narrowing, 16-year-olds who receive free school meals do less well than others of the same age and the gap in performance between the two groups is widening as it is nationally. While the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is higher than in similar areas more 19-year-olds are achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the provision in secondary schools and secondary sixth forms so that more of it is good or better.
- Raise the achievement of 16-year-olds who receive free school meals so that they perform as well as others of the same age.
- Improve the quality of early years and childcare so that more are good or better.

Outcomes for children and young people

Most providers have good or better arrangements for encouraging children and young people to live healthy lifestyles. However, child carers and the sixth form college are only adequate in this respect. The majority of outcomes are in line with, or above, the averages elsewhere. The take-up of school lunches continues to be better than in similar areas and the numbers of five- and 11-year-olds who are very overweight are still lower than in other local authorities of this type. However, child and adolescent mental health services continue to be less effective than the average nationally. There has also been a decline in the proportion of children and young people taking part in physical activities and sport. This figure is now below the national average.

The large majority of providers are good or better at ensuring that children and young people are safe. However, there is more satisfactory provision among childminders and child carers, and the children's homes and the fostering and adoption services run by private and voluntary agencies. A recent unannounced inspection highlighted the quality, timeliness and consistency of the support that front-line services provide for children and young people referred to them and the significant improvements in outcomes for children in need. There have been reductions in: the number of children killed or injured in road accidents; the number admitted to hospital; the number who have been bullied; and the number who become the subject of a child protection plan a second time. The adoption service is of high quality. However, adoptions for children and young people who are particularly hard to place are taking longer to arrange.

The large majority of primary and secondary schools, pupil referral units and children's homes give good or better support to children and young people to help them do well and enjoy their learning. The sixth form college is good in this respect. Most providers of childcare make good or better provision for children's learning. Three- to five-year olds achieve as well as their peers in similar areas. The same is true of 11-year-olds. The performance of children in care is in line with that for children in care in similar local authorities. For the last five years, the number of all 16-year olds gaining five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, has risen steadily, in line with the average for similar areas and provisional GCSE results for 2010 show significant improvement. For the last two years, the proportion gaining two or more good GCSE grades in science has been above average. The number of secondary students who are persistently absent from school has fallen and, in the very large majority of secondary schools, behaviour is good or outstanding.

The local authority has a well-established tradition of enabling children and young people to contribute to the community and take part in cultural and artistic activities. The number involved in these has risen to above the national average. Almost all other outcomes remain in line with averages elsewhere. However, the rate of teenage pregnancies is higher than average and too little progress has been made in improving the situation. In most respects, the youth offending service works well.

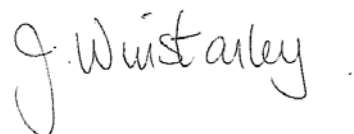
The sixth form college and the large majority of the local authority's maintained special schools are outstanding at helping young people develop the knowledge and skills necessary to gain a job. However, primary and secondary schools and the pupil referral units are only satisfactory at this. The independent special school is also satisfactory. The number of low-income families who take up their entitlement to child care, so that they can work, continues to rise. The same is true of the number of 17-year-olds in education or training. The number of 19-year-olds who have gained the equivalent of five or more good GCSE passes continues to rise in line with improvements in similar areas. The same is true of 19-year-olds with two A level passes or the equivalent. Care leavers in work or training or who live in suitable accommodation are in line with the averages in similar areas. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training however has been higher than in similar areas for the last four years and the figure has remained virtually unchanged since last year.

Prospects for improvement

The review of the Children and Young People's Plan refers to the measures taken to improve the management of local services. These include remodelling the children's social work services, integrating informal education services and bringing all education support services together into a single Education Improvement Division. These changes have led to improvements, particularly in social care and in the most recent provisional GCSE examination results. The local authority has established strong partnerships and there is a strong commitment to further improvement from officers and elected members. The cross-party support and scrutiny arrangements form an important part of this process. For example, effective support is given to weaker schools and to reducing the number of secondary schools not meeting the expected targets.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with the 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