

9 December 2009

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

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 Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

The performance of the local authority's schools is mixed although there is very little inadequate provision. The overall effectiveness is good or better in half of all schools and settings but there is too much provision which is satisfactory. While no secondary schools are inadequate, less than half of the 16 schools are good and none are outstanding. Although this proportion is lower than in similar areas or that found nationally the overall effectiveness of secondary schools is improving. Provision for very young children in childcare settings is satisfactory but the proportion of good or better provision is smaller than the national average or in similar areas. However, the large majority of the 34 nurseries are outstanding or good; this performance is better than that found nationally.

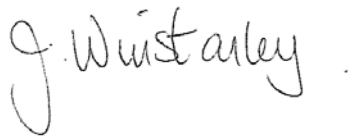
Five out of six special schools are outstanding. The overall percentage of good or better pupil referral units is below the national average even though a third are outstanding. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are good. The overall standard of the local authority's children's homes is below the national average, although two are outstanding and none were judged inadequate in their last inspection. The majority of judgements made under Every Child Matters are good or better, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving. The joint area review of children's services in 2007 judged arrangements to safeguard children as good and there have been no serious case reviews since December 2008.

Performance against the very large majority of the available national indicators is at least as good as that found in similar areas and nationally. Achievement at Key Stages 2 and 4 are improving and, whilst rates are just above similar area averages at Key Stage 2, they are in line at Key Stage 4. Attainment of pupils of Asian heritage at Key Stage 4 is in line with the national figure and for similar areas; performance in this area has improved significantly over the last three years. Attainment for Black pupils however continues to be well below the national figure. The achievement gap at Key Stage 2, between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers, is narrower than that seen in similar areas and is in line at Key Stage 4.

Numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training in Bolton are decreasing although the proportion continues to be greater than that seen nationally or in similar areas.

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.

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, CAA