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Ms Cheryl Eastwood
Executive Director, Children's Services
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Floor 7, Municipal Offices
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Dear Ms Eastwood

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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.

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of providers are good or better and help children and young people to learn and stay safe. The strengths and areas for improvement are similar to last year, although there have been some changes. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place. Since last year, one academy has been established and three schools have closed. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

In 2010, a full inspection of safeguarding and services looked after children reported that safeguarding arrangements were adequate, although further work was needed to improve services at the point of access. A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection highlighted the significant improvements made and identified no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- As in 2010, the very large majority of day care provision is good or better and none of it is inadequate. The one children's centre inspected last year was good. This year, three are good and one is outstanding, with two others being satisfactory.
- The provision for children under five continues to be good or better in the large majority of nurseries and primary schools. For the last four years, the achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been in line with the averages in similar areas and nationally. The achievement gap between five-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed over the last four years and is slightly smaller than in similar areas and across the country.
- The large majority of secondary schools are good or better. Since last year, three secondary schools have closed. Two were good and the other was inadequate. Of the current schools, none is inadequate.
- The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five A* to C, including English and mathematics, at GCSE has been in line with the averages for similar areas for the last four years. The rate of improvement over that time has been greater than across the country. The gaps in attainment between 16-year-olds from low-income families or who have special needs and others of the same age have narrowed.

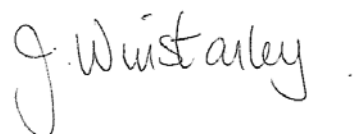
- Of the four special schools run by the local authority, all are now good. This is an improvement on 2010 when one of the schools was only satisfactory. The local authority's pupil referral service has recently been re-inspected and continues to be good and to have good capacity for sustained improvement. However, attendance remains an area in need of attention.
- The local authority's adoption and fostering agencies have not been re-inspected since last year. Therefore, they continue to be rated as good and outstanding respectively. Of the four children's homes run by the local authority, two are good and two are satisfactory.

Areas for further improvement

- Sixth form provision has not improved since last year. Of the five providers inspected, none of them is outstanding and three are still only satisfactory. However, in its recent inspection, the further education college was judged to have improved from satisfactory to good.
- Although the large majority of primary schools continue to be good or better, the number of inadequate schools has increased from one to three. Until very recently, this number was four but the latest inspection found that, with the support of the local authority, one school that was subject to special measures had improved. It is now satisfactory with good capacity for further improvement. For the last four years, the standards achieved by 11-year-olds have been in line with similar areas and have risen at a faster rate than nationally. However, provisional figures for 2011 indicate a fall from last year.
- The proportion of 19-year-olds gaining two A levels or the equivalent is in line with similar areas but below the national average. The achievement gap at this age between young people from low-income families and their contemporaries has not changed for the last three years, although it is narrower than the averages nationally and for similar areas.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment