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Mr Nick Page
Strategic Director of Children's Services
Salford City Council
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Dear Mr Page

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.

Salford City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Salford City Council perform poorly. In August 2009, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified areas for priority action. In May 2010, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found that services for looked after children were adequate but that safeguarding arrangements were inadequate. Because of these weaknesses, children's services overall were subsequently assessed as performing poorly.

A second unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection was held in March 2011. This found that the areas of priority action identified in 2009 had all been met and significant progress had been made on the recommendations of the 2010 inspection. This time, no areas for priority action were identified. However, until a further full re-inspection of safeguarding services has taken place, the judgement made in May 2010 remains.

The majority of other provision is good or better and helps children and young people to stay safe and enjoy learning. The strengths and areas for improvement are similar to last year.

Strengths

- For children under five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good or better. None of it is inadequate, which is an improvement on last year. The achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with the averages for similar areas and nationally. Over the last three years, the achievement gap between five-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed.
- Nine of the 12 secondary schools maintained by the local authority are good or better and, as in 2010, none of them is inadequate. Interim assessments of two schools show that their outstanding performance has been maintained. There is less persistent absence from secondary schools in Salford than in similar areas.
- The local authority's adoption agency has recently been re-inspected and continues to be good. When inspected in September 2010, the fostering agency was also found to have maintained its good performance.
- There has been an improvement in the quality of the local authority's children's homes, with one of them now being outstanding. The other seven continue to be good. Of the children's homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities, the large majority are good or better and none of the provision is inadequate.

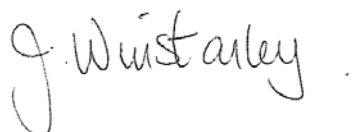
- The attainment of 11-year-olds is in line with the averages nationally and for similar areas and has improved at a faster rate than elsewhere. Provisional figures for 2011 indicate that this level of performance has been maintained. Results for 16-year-olds gaining grades A* to C at GCSE in five subjects, including English and mathematics, are also in line with averages for similar areas and across the country. The gap in attainment between 16-year-olds who are eligible for free schools meals and others of the same age has narrowed because of a considerable recent improvement in the attainment of pupils from low-income families. It is now narrower than in similar areas and elsewhere in the country. The achievement gap between 19-year-olds from low-income families and their contemporaries has also narrowed.

Areas for further improvement

- There is a continuing need to improve safeguarding services.
- Although the number of inadequate primary schools has fallen from two to one, there are still too many that are no better than satisfactory. The local authority recognises this and, in May 2011, issued formal warning notices for improvement to six schools.
- Despite recent improvements, too much of the provision for early years and childcare continues to be no better than satisfactory. Since last year, one of the local authority's 16 children's centres has been inspected and judged to be satisfactory.
- The quality of post-16 provision is too variable. As in 2010, none of it is outstanding. Of the three secondary sixth forms inspected, one is inadequate and the other two are only satisfactory. Despite recent improvements, the proportion of 19-year-olds gaining two A levels or the equivalent is in line with similar areas but below the average nationally.

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