

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
**Textphone** 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

**Direct T** 020 7421 6666  
**Direct F** 020 7421 5633  
[Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk)



8 November 2011

Ms Eleanor Brazil  
Transitional Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families  
Birmingham City Council  
Directorate of Children, Young People and Families  
Council House Extension  
Margaret Street  
Birmingham  
B3 3BU

Dear Ms Brazil

## 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.

## Birmingham City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
--------------------------------	---------------------

Children's services in Birmingham City Council perform poorly. In July 2010, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found safeguarding services to be inadequate. The local authority's capacity for improvement was also judged to be inadequate. Services for looked after children were adequate as was capacity to improve these services. As a result of this inspection, and the weaknesses in safeguarding services, the 2010 assessment of children's services overall was judged to be performing poorly. Birmingham has in place an improvement plan to address the identified weaknesses and is making progress in line with this, overseen by an independently chaired improvement board. However, the children's services assessment for 2011 remains performs poorly until further safeguarding inspection evidence is available.

The weaknesses in safeguarding services are significant. The local authority's own assessment and the view of the independent chair of the improvement board show that the rate of progress has picked up momentum and much is happening in a range of key areas, such as partnership with health, review of front-line practice and reorganisation of services. These developments have yet to demonstrate impact and many initiatives are recent. However, strengths in education services identified in 2010 have been maintained and, in some areas, improved further. The very large majority of setting and institutions help children and young people to achieve and enjoy their learning.

### Strengths

- The large majority of early years and childcare provision remains good as reported in 2010. Over half of the children centres inspected are also at least good although one is now inadequate.
- For children under five, provision in nursery and primary schools has improved and the large majority is good or outstanding. Very young children make good progress in their development and, over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved more quickly than nationally. In Birmingham, the proportion of children under five who live in low-income families is twice the national average. Levels of development for these children are rising and they now do better than their counterparts nationally and in similar areas.
- Much has been done to address the weakness identified in the 2010 assessment concerning the need to improve primary schools. More are now good or better and, importantly, the number placed in an Ofsted category of concern is reducing. Ofsted monitoring visits show that the primary schools currently in this category are making satisfactory progress. Results at the age of 11 match similar areas and provisional results for 2011 show significant improvement.

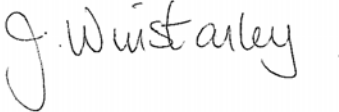
- As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and more academies opened in Birmingham over the past year. The overall provision continues to be mostly good although one secondary school is now in an Ofsted category of concern. Over the past four years, results at Key Stage 4 for 16-year-olds have improved significantly and are now above those of similar areas. Importantly, gaps in attainment between young people of different backgrounds are closing. The proportion of young people from low-income families and from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds who achieve good GCSE results including English and mathematics has improved and these young people do as well as their counterparts in similar areas and nationally.
- At the age of 19, outcomes are also improving and, in 2010, more 19-year-olds, including those from a low-income background, achieved level 2 or level 3 qualifications than in similar local authorities.
- Specialist education provision, including the local authority special schools and their sixth forms, the pupil referral units and the residential special schools remain mostly good or better, as they were last year. Some provision has improved from good to outstanding, such as that provided by an independent specialist college for learners with visual impairment and other complex needs.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- There are still serious weaknesses in services to safeguard children and young people. Although services have gone through major remodelling to establish effective safeguarding standards and secure stability within social care, the local authority acknowledges that much remains to be done to ensure that children and young people are consistently enabled to be safe and stay safe across the whole city.
- Services for looked after children and young people are only adequate overall. The local authority fostering and adoption services are good but the privately-run agencies are mostly satisfactory. The large majority of all the children's homes used by the local authority, including those privately-run, are good or outstanding. Five of the children's homes run by the local authority are outstanding. However, four are inadequate, which is a serious concern.
- The May 2011 inspection of the youth offending service reported strengths in good multi-agency working, in reducing the likelihood of re-offending and in the achievement of positive outcomes for young people. However, it also found that substantial improvement was required in its work to reduce the risk of harm and moderate improvement to its safeguarding work and to prevent re-offending by young people.
- As was the case in 2010, post-16 provision remains mostly satisfactory. Only about half of school sixth forms and colleges are good or better.

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 style with a large initial 'J' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment