

8 November 2011

Mr Bob Clark
Interim Director for Education and Children's Services
Liverpool City Council
Children, Families and Adults
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Dear Mr Clark

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.

Liverpool City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Liverpool City Council perform excellently. This marks a notable improvement on the good performance in 2010. The very large majority of inspected settings, services and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and consistently good performance in most settings ensures that children and young people stay safe and learn. There have been recent changes to secondary school provision which include one outstanding school that has converted to academy status, while four secondary schools, of which one is judged to be outstanding and three are satisfactory, have combined to become two sponsored academies. These inspection judgements have been taken into account in the 2011 assessment. The local authority has built upon its established strengths and there has been good progress in the key areas for further development identified in last year's assessment, with improved educational standards for 11- and 16-year-olds.

A recent announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services reports that both aspects of provision are good with some outstanding features, and each demonstrate good capacity to improve. Leadership is strong and the local authority and its partners show on-going commitment to children's services, ensuring safeguarding is a high priority.

Strengths

- The mostly good or outstanding performance of nursery and primary schools has been maintained. All but one of those children's centres which have been inspected for the first time this year is good or outstanding. The only inadequate provision is found in one registered day-care setting.
- Educational standards for those aged five, 11, 16 and 19 years have improved, demonstrating an upward trend over a four-year period from very low baselines, particularly for children aged 5 and 11. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage the gap in achievement between young children from low-income families and others of the same age has improved and is in line with similar areas. Provisional results for 2011 show improved performance in national tests at 11 years old, which were below those in similar areas in 2010 but inline with the national average.
- The large majority of secondary schools and sixth forms are good or better; this performance has been sustained since last year and is better than similar areas. Nearly all special schools and one of the two pupil referral units are good or better, with more that are outstanding than last year.
- Results in achievement of 16-year-olds gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including mathematics and English, continue to improve and more young people from low-income families are achieving at this level

than in similar areas and nationally. The gap in standards between this group and their peers in Liverpool has narrowed recently. Those with special educational needs also do well at this stage and better than their peers in similar areas and nationally, although the gap has widened over time.

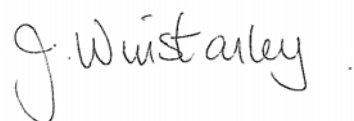
- The proportion of 19-year-olds from low-income families achieving level 2 qualifications has increased, and the gap in attainment between this group and others of the same age in Liverpool has reduced and is now narrower than the gap in similar areas and nationally. The proportion of young people also achieving the higher level 3 qualifications increased this year and is now better than similar areas.
- The four local authority children's homes are good, as is the local authority adoption agency. The large majority of children's homes from which the local authority commissions places are also good or better. Two of the three private and voluntary adoption and fostering services are good or outstanding, as is the local authority adoption agency. Performance has been maintained since 2010.
- Outstanding features in safeguarding arrangements include the ambition and prioritisation of the local authority and its partners, and the contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe. Health outcomes for looked after children and opportunities for them to make a positive contribution are also outstanding. The Ofsted report commented strongly on the high ambition for the safety of children and young people across the city, and for the needs and aspirations of those who are looked after by the local authority.

Areas for further improvement

- Progress made by very young children in the Early Year's Foundation Stage declined slightly in 2010 and remains below the average for all other areas. Although improving year on year, children at age 11 do not do as well in national tests in English and mathematics as those in similar areas and nationally.
- One third of childminding and registered day-care settings, one of the two pupil referral units and approximately one quarter of primary schools are satisfactory.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment