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Ms Janet Donaldson
Group Director of Children and Young People's Services
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Northgate House
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Dear Ms Donaldson

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.

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council perform poorly. In January 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 judged to be adequate. As a result of this inspection, children's services were judged to be performing poorly in 2010. In January 2011, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection, although finding no areas for priority action, found no strengths and identified nine areas for development. The inspection noted that many areas for development from the previous unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in 2009 and the full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children had been addressed, and that four previously identified areas had not made sufficient progress. Until further safeguarding inspection evidence is available, the children's services assessment for 2011 remains performs poorly.

The weaknesses in safeguarding services are significant and improving the quality of safeguarding remains the major area for further development. However, the large majority of settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and the very large majority help children and young people to enjoy learning and to stay safe. Areas of strength remain broadly the same as last year. Previous inspection judgements for secondary schools that have become academies have been taken into account in making this assessment.

Strengths

- For children under five, the very large majority of provision in nursery and primary schools is good or better.
- The large majority of primary schools make good or better provision for their pupils. Monitoring visits show that the local authority has provided good support and challenge to the few schools in an Ofsted category of concern and helped them to improve. Key Stage 2 results are in line with similar areas and the national average and provisional data for 2011 show an improvement of 2% against the standstill position achieved nationally.
- Almost two-thirds of secondary schools are good or better and this shows improvement from last year. Provisional data for the proportion of pupils achieving at least five GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics indicate good improvement in 2011.

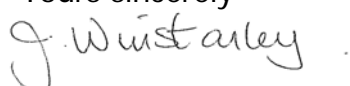
- The quality of school sixth forms has improved and this was an area identified for further development in 2010. The local further education college has also improved from satisfactory to good since last year's assessment.
- Specialist provision in Calderdale is good. All special schools in the local area and the pupil referral unit are good or better and the local authority's adoption agency remains good.
- The most recent published figures show that achievement gaps have narrowed between young people from low-income families and their peers in Calderdale at the age of 16 and by 19.
- A recent inspection of youth offending services identified good outcomes in the key areas of performance.

Areas for further improvement

- There are serious weaknesses in services to safeguard children and young people. This continues to be the major area of development for Calderdale. The local authority still needs to improve the inconsistent application of thresholds for access to children's social care. In front-line services improvements needed include: the quality of referrals from partner agencies; aspects of management in the First Response service; inconsistency of recording, including recording management decisions on the electronic recording system; the timeliness of completing assessments and the frequency of staff supervision.
- Although overall a majority of early years and childcare provision is good or better, the recent inspections of children's centres have found five of the seven inspected to be only adequate.
- The quality of children's homes has varied over the last year. In 2010 all four local authority children's homes were good. This year, although one home is now outstanding, two were adequate at an earlier point in the year and are now good again and one remains adequate. The provision that Calderdale commissions elsewhere is at least satisfactory.
- At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the proportion of children from low-income families achieving a good level of development is below the national average and that of similar areas. The gap in achievement with all children in Calderdale has continued to rise.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley

Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment