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8 November 2011

Ms Pauline Pilkington  
Executive Director for Children's Services  
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council  
Room 39, The Council House  
Lichfield Street  
Walsall  
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Dear Ms Pilkington

## 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.

## Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately as they did in 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and provision helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. Three secondary schools and two primary schools, all of which were good or outstanding at their last inspections, have converted to academy status since the start of this academic year. These inspection judgements have been taken into account in the 2011 assessment. Some areas for development identified in last year's assessment letter have improved. For example, there has been improvement in standards of achievement for children age five years, 11 years and 16 years.

In January 2011 the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection reported one main strength, a wide range of practice that met requirements and three areas for development. There are no issues requiring urgent remedial action.

### Strengths

- Standards for the majority of pupils at all ages continue to improve year-on-year and are in line with similar areas. Five-year-olds from low-income families achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the gap has narrowed between this group and other children of the same age in Walsall, in similar areas and nationally. Performance in national tests for 11-year-olds in 2010 was in line with similar areas and the national average and provisional data in 2011 shows further improvement to above the national average for the first time. At 16 years the percentage of those achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSEs including English and mathematics continues to improve and provisional data for 2011 results shows a further rise. Asian young people in Walsall perform better at age 16 than their peers. At age 19 the numbers achieving level 2 qualifications, the equivalent of 5 or more good GCSEs, and the higher level 3 qualifications are in line with similar areas but below national averages.
- The majority of early years and childcare settings are good or better. The three children's centres that have been inspected for the first time are all good or outstanding.
- The local authority provides good support to schools that need to improve. Two secondary schools have improved their overall rating from satisfactory to good and outstanding. Three secondary schools and one primary school have recently come out of special measures and Ofsted monitoring letters state that the intervention and challenge provided by

the local authority have been instrumental in accelerating the progress these schools have made. Only one primary school is now inadequate and has an Ofsted notice to improve. The latest monitoring letter states that the school is receiving satisfactory support from the local authority and has made satisfactory progress in addressing issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.

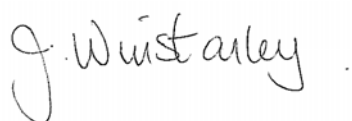
- Specialist provision continues to perform strongly. All special schools and the secondary special sixth form are good or outstanding as is one of the two pupil referral units. Nearly all children's homes, including those commissioned by the local authority, are good or better and this shows good improvement from last year. Recent inspections of the local authority fostering and adoption agencies judged overall effectiveness of both to be good.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Most aspects of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection are satisfactory. There are three areas requiring attention. These include delays in completing initial assessments, although recently published data show that these delays have reduced. Further work, such as staff training is on-going to improve the quality of analysis in initial and core assessments and this remains an area of concern from 2010.
- Key areas of provision remain only satisfactory and there has been some decline in performance since last year's assessment. This includes approximately one third of childminding and registered day-care settings.
- A significant proportion of secondary schools and post-16 settings continue to be satisfactory and below performance of comparators in similar areas and nationally. There is however no inadequate provision this year, and this shows improvement since 2010.
- The gaps in achievement between all young people in Walsall aged between 16 and 19 years, and those who are from low-income families or with special educational needs, have increased since 2009 and fewer achieve as well as their peers in similar areas and nationally.
- The most recent inspection of youth offending work in Walsall judged one area of work out of three as requiring substantial improvement.

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