

8 November 2011

Mr Gerald Meehan
Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Halton Borough Council
Municipal Building
Kingsway
Widnes
Cheshire WA8 7QF

Dear Mr Meehan

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.

Halton Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
---------------------------------------	--------------------------

Children's services in Halton Borough Council perform well. Performance has been maintained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and most provision effectively helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. The main strengths and areas for further development have not changed significantly since last year although there has been continued improvement in standards achieved by 19-year-olds. Two secondary schools have become academies this year, one which is judged to be satisfactory at its last inspection and one judged as outstanding. These judgements have been taken into account in the 2011 assessment.

A full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services this year judged both safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children to be good with outstanding features and outstanding capacity to improve. The report states that the local authority and its partners demonstrate a steady and consistent track record of service improvement within a challenging local context of high level deprivation.

Strengths

- The latest inspection of services for safeguarding and looked after children services judged policy and practice to be highly effective in promoting the safety and welfare of children and young people. Outcomes for looked after children in health, education, safeguarding and economic well-being are good and demonstrate on-going improvement.
- There is very little inadequate provision across all settings and institutions. A very small proportion of early years and childcare provision is inadequate and one primary school has recently come out of special measures
- Two children's centres inspected for the first time are good with good capacity to improve.
- Educational standards for children and young people aged 11 and 16 continue to improve year on year. Performance in secondary schools has improved since 2010 with two secondary schools now outstanding and one that is good. Provisional results for 11-year-olds in the 2011 national tests show that most continue to achieve standards that are above the national average. Girls do significantly better than boys. An increasingly higher proportion of young people aged 16 in Halton are achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, and provisional results for 2011 show that performance continues to improve strongly. The gap between those from low-income families and other 16-year-olds in Halton, though slightly wider than last year, continues to be narrower than similar areas. Higher numbers of 16-year-olds who have

special educational needs are gaining good GCSEs than in similar areas and the gap between this group and their peers in Halton has narrowed since 2008, reversing the national trend.

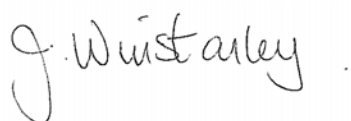
- The general further education college is good, and the sixth form school on the college site is also good. More young people by the age of 19 years are achieving level 2 qualifications equivalent to at least five GCSE A* to C grades and at level 3, equivalent to two or more A levels. The gap between those young people from low-income families achieving level 2 qualifications and their peers is narrowing in line with the national trend and is better than similar areas. The gap in achievement at level 3 is significantly narrower than elsewhere but has widened since 2009.
- The secondary school persistent absence rate continues to reduce and is lower than in similar areas.
- The quality of special school provision, including one of the two pupil referral units continues to perform strongly and most settings are judged to be good or outstanding.
- The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good. The two local authority children's homes are outstanding and the very large majority of commissioned provision is good. No provision used by the local authority is inadequate and only one home has a satisfactory judgment.

Areas for further improvement

- The rate of achievement of very young children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is steady and improving but still below that in similar areas. The gap between young children from low-income families and others of the same age has widened during the last four years.
- Too much registered day care and childminding provision for very young children continues to be satisfactory, having taken account of those settings where no children are on roll, and this has not changed significantly since last year.
- The quality of some secondary schools and secondary sixth form provision continues to be only satisfactory.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment