

9 December 2009

Mr Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Hamilton Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead
Wirral
CH41 4FD

Dear Mr Cooper

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

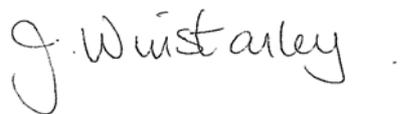
Children's services rating	Performs well
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Children's services in Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council perform well.

A higher than average proportion of secondary schools and special schools is good or outstanding. However, performance in early years settings and in primary schools is less effective, with more satisfactory provision than in similar areas. Post-16 education delivered by the general further education college and the sixth form college is satisfactory, although both settings perform below those in similar areas and nationally. Performance continues to be variable in those settings for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The majority of special schools are outstanding and the pupil referral unit is good. The local authority fostering agency is good. However, two of the three children's homes and the local adoption agency are only satisfactory and private fostering arrangements were found to be inadequate at the last inspection. Judgements for all Every Child Matters outcomes are good or better in a large majority of inspected and regulated services and settings, although children's homes and the local authority adoption agency demonstrate weaknesses in staying safe and similarly the colleges and the local fostering agency show weaker performance in aspects of achieving economic well-being.

Performance against a large majority of indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with similar areas and national averages. There are weaknesses in staying safe and achieving economic well-being. The numbers of looked after children remain higher than the national average and there is considerable fluctuation in outcomes for this group. The gap in achievement outcomes between those children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age are generally consistent with similar areas and national averages. Progress at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is good for most pupils although the achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers is considerably wider than elsewhere. Most young people continue to do well and participation rates in training at 17-years-old are good, as are level 2 and level 3 achievements by age 19. However, the proportion of young people aged 16 and over not in education, employment or training is slightly larger than in similar areas and the numbers of care leavers in employment or training are considerably lower.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA