

9 December 2010

Mr Keith Moore
Executive Director of Children's Services
Sunderland City Council
The Civic Centre
Sunderland SR2 7DN

Dear Mr Moore

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes 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 data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against 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 2009, 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.

Sunderland City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Perform well (3)
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Children's services in Sunderland City Council perform well.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Nurseries and primary schools are mostly good. The special schools are also good and two are outstanding. The majority of the secondary schools are good. Post-16 provision, including the two independent specialist colleges for young people with complex needs, is also strong. The very few schools judged to be inadequate are making at least satisfactory progress. Inspections show that just over half of the children's homes and early years and childcare settings are at least good. Three of the four pupil referral units are satisfactory and only one is good. The local fostering and adoption agencies are good.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes are at least in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. Overall attainment of five-year-olds matches similar areas. However, strategies to narrow the gap between the lowest achievers at that age and all five-year-olds in Sunderland are not yet having sufficient impact and the gap remains too wide. Results in national tests for 11-year-olds are below those of similar areas. At age 16, results match those in similar areas, although young people who have special educational needs do less well than the same children nationally. The proportion of young people with good qualifications by the age of 19 matches similar areas. The local authority has successfully reduced the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training.

Key areas for further development

- Improve educational outcomes at age 11.
- Improve educational outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.
- Reduce the gap between the lowest achieving five-year-olds and all children at the end of the Reception Year.

Outcomes for children and young people

Almost all schools encourage children and young people to lead healthy lives but the childminders are less strong in this aspect. Inspections report that health promotion is at least satisfactory in the pupil referral units and the homes for children in care. The local authority has improved arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthier lives. These include services to meet the mental and emotional health of children and young people, and increasing the take-up of

lunches in primary and secondary schools, which now matches the take-up in similar areas. The same proportion of young people as found nationally participates in sport but fewer are satisfied with parks and play areas. In its 2009–2010 Children and Young People's Plan, the local authority identified the need to continue to increase the number of mothers who breast-feed their babies and reduce the number of those who smoke during their pregnancy. There has been a good reduction to the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant.

Almost all measures of performance for keeping children and young people safe are at least as good as in similar areas or England. The two weaker aspects are the higher number of children who report that they have experienced bullying and the above average number of children admitted to hospital because they are injured either accidentally or deliberately. Good local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm and meet their needs and those of their family. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found that there was a strong commitment from Sunderland City Council to improve further the quality of front-line social work services. The Children and Young People's Plan recognises that more needs to be done to improve the lives of children affected by violence in the home and the impact on children's well-being of parents who drink too much or take drugs.

The majority of nurseries and schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Early years and childcare provision is less strong with only about half judged to be good when inspected. Inspections also show that, although many primary schools are good overall, about a third are only satisfactory. More needs to be done to raise the achievement of the lowest achieving five-year-olds. The number of primary schools not reaching the minimum expected levels in the national tests is above similar areas. At age 11, results are below those of similar areas. Three primary schools and one secondary school have been judged to be inadequate by Ofsted. Monitoring visits show that the local authority provides well-targeted support to improve provision in these schools. Standards have risen in secondary schools and, by the age of 16, young people do as well as in similar areas. In the pupil referral units, judged to be satisfactory by Ofsted, students receive good pastoral support but education standards remain low and the persistent absence of some students places their future at a significant disadvantage. The Children and Young People's Plan acknowledges the need to raise standards for some specific groups of young people, including young people from low-income families and those who have special educational needs.

The views of children and young people are used well to inform the planning and reviewing of services. For example, the *Citizen Week*, started in October 2008, provides a formal opportunity for children and young people to explore local issues and offer possible solutions. In the best children's homes young people in care influence the way the home should be run. The inspections of the satisfactory pupil referral units judged that they are successful in involving parents and young people, for example when preparing for an eventual return of the young person to their main school. On almost all measures, performance is good. Permanent exclusion is below average, few young people break the law more than once and almost all young

offenders are in education, work or training. However, the number of 10- to 17-year-olds who break the law for the first time, although reducing, is above similar areas.

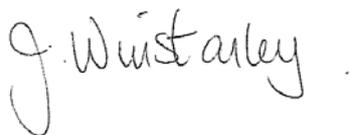
The local authority and its partners have been successful in improving outcomes for 16- to 19-year-olds. Young people in Sunderland do as well as those in similar areas or England on all measures of performance. A range of strategies and rigorous interventions has reduced the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training and it now matches similar areas. More young people, including those from low-income backgrounds, gain qualifications needed for future jobs. Most care leavers are in education, work or training and are given a suitable place to live when they leave care. The colleges and most schools, including the special schools, prepare young people well for future studies and life after school. The Children and Young People's Plan identifies clearly where further actions are required, in particular to provide more apprenticeships for young people, support low-income families and reduce child poverty.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates a good understanding of what needs to improve. Progress has been made in important areas. The ten key priorities, identified for 2009–2010, take good account of the local context and resources are rightly directed where outcomes for children and young people are too low. The Children and Young People's Plan reflects the local authority's key strategic issues well, especially in tackling child poverty and unemployment over the next ten years. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found that there is a strong commitment from Sunderland City Council to fund children's services in response to the increasing demands on social care services. Ofsted's monitoring visits confirm that the local authority supports weaker schools well and helps them to develop the capacity to improve by themselves.

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". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment