

9 December 2009

Dr Helen Paterson
Director of Children's Services
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The Civic Centre
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Dear Dr Paterson

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

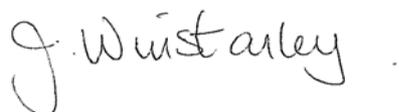
Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Sunderland City Council perform well.

A higher than average proportion of secondary schools, including the schools' sixth forms, is good or outstanding and none are inadequate. All seven special schools are good or outstanding. However, too much primary school provision remains only satisfactory and the proportion rated good or better is smaller than in similar areas and found nationally. This is also the case for childcare and childminder provision. Most nurseries are good or better although the proportion is smaller than that of similar areas and the national proportion. Private fostering arrangements are good. Performance of the local authority's fostering and adoption agencies is also good. One children's home is outstanding, one is good with outstanding features, and five are satisfactory.

Performance against a very large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with similar areas and broadly in line with the national figure. The difference in the performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age is still too wide. However, the gap is closing; for, example, looked after children do well at age 11 and a good proportion of care leavers are in education, employment or training and have access to suitable accommodation. Achievement of a level 2 qualification by age 19 matches the national figure. However, the proportion of all 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training is far too high and much greater than in similar areas and the proportion nationally.

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.



Juliet Winstanley
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