

9 December 2009

Mr Tony Howell
Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families
Birmingham City Council
Council House Extension
Margaret Street
Birmingham
B3 3BU

Dear Mr Howell

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 poorly (1)
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The rating for children's services in Birmingham City Council is that it performs poorly.

While the overall effectiveness of the majority of the local authority's inspected and regulated services and settings is adequate, in the 2008 annual performance assessment, the local authority's arrangements for safeguarding children were judged as inadequate, leading to a statutory improvement notice. There are some early signs of improvement as noted in the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements, but there remain significant weaknesses in some areas of social care provision. Just over half of the 22 children's homes are now good. However, the number of children's homes judged to be inadequate is an ongoing concern; private fostering arrangements are inadequate and there are a high number of serious cases of non accidental child death or injury. These weaknesses have played a pivotal role in determining the children's service rating for 2009. The local authority acknowledges that there is "some way to go in certain performance areas".

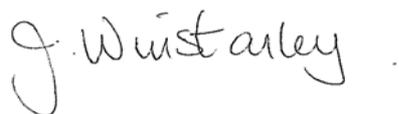
At the same time, performance in early years settings and secondary schools is good. In primary schools however, performance is below that in similar areas although there are few inadequate schools. Two of the four pupil referral units are judged to be good and two adequate. Judgements for staying safe and enjoy and achieve are good or better for most inspected or regulated services.

The quality of provision and services for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is variable. While the proportion of good or better special schools is higher than nationally and in similar areas, and the local authority's adoption service was judged as good in its most recent inspection, there is inadequate provision in some children's homes and in the arrangements for private fostering. The local authority's fostering service is adequate.

Performance against a large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is improving and at least as good as that in similar areas. The gap in achievement between those children and young people whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and their peers is in line with similar areas and 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA