

WIRRAL CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD – 18th JANUARY 2011

ANNUAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSESSMENT 2010

1.0 Background

Wirral Children's Services are assessed annually regarding their ability to deliver the five outcomes for children and young people outlined in Every Child Matters. The assessment is carried out annually by Ofsted in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report informs Wirral Children's Trust of the 2010 assessment findings and the actions put in place to address areas identified by Ofsted for further development.

2.0 Rating of Children's Services

Wirral Children's Services was assessed by Ofsted in 2010 and the assessment was published on the 9th of December 2010. Wirral Children's Services was found to 'perform well', rated at 3 out of a possible 4 point scale.

The Children's Services Assessment (CSA) is derived from a performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in the local area. The 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

In 2009 the CSA was included as part of the multi-inspectorate Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). In 2010 the CAA was abolished however the CSA process was maintained and is carried out by Ofsted.

The 2010 assessment has identified three key areas for further development. The areas identified and the actions that are in place to address them are outlined in this report.

3.0 Areas for Further Development

The key areas for further development are:

- Improve early years and childcare settings so that more are good or better.
- Improve further the achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families.
- Improve the local arrangements for adoption.

Wirral Children's Trust partnership and the Council's Children and Young People's Department is addressing these issues through actions in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and will ensure that they are embedded in the refresh of the CYPP for 2011-12. They will also be addressed through the delivery of the Council's Strategic Objectives. Current activities and projects underway related to each area are outlined below.

Early Years and Childcare Settings.

Providers in the private, voluntary and independent sector who are registered with Ofsted as childcare providers are inspected by Ofsted to ensure their compliance with statutory regulation. Providers in these sectors include day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, childminders, before and after school care and holiday clubs. Ofsted retains the responsibility for regulation and enforcement of statutory duties in registered provision.

The responsibility of the Local Authority lies with what is termed “retained functions”, that is, to maintain an advice, support and guidance service to potential new and current childcare providers. A key element of the work of the SureStart team is to provide support in respect of quality in provision with a focus working with settings to achieve a ‘good’ inspection judgement. Additional work includes business advice to ensure sustainability, and access to training and workforce development opportunities. The SureStart team range of provision includes:

- Targeted support to providers receiving an inadequate judgement from Ofsted which includes a visit from a Foundation Stage Consultant for early years settings, or from a Childcare development Worker for childminders or out of school schemes. This will also include development of an action plan to support the provider in moving out of the inadequate judgement.
- Implementation of the Quality Improvement Support Programme with early years providers, leading to an action plan linked to focussed support from a Foundation Stage Consultant. This is part of the Local Authority’s role in terms of support and challenge to providers.
- Access to a termly training programme that offers courses in statutory requirements such as Safeguarding and First Aid, as well as comprehensive Continuing Professional Development.
- Advice and guidance to potential new providers that covers business planning, adherence to regulatory frameworks, policy development and the development of quality sustainable provision.
- Access to advice, including 1:1 support and site visits.
- Analysis of trends identified through scrutiny of Ofsted reports which is shared regularly with providers.

Early years Ofsted inspection grades are: outstanding; good; satisfactory and inadequate – with two types of ‘inadequate’; inadequate 1 – weak provision where the standard of care is not good enough and inadequate 2 – poor provision that needs urgent attention. Private, voluntary and independent sector providers are compelled to work with the Local Authority when the judgement is made at inadequate 2 “Notice to Improve”. A judgement of inadequate 1 or above means the provider is not obliged to work with the Local Authority and responsibility to improve rests entirely with the provider.

Currently, there are no early years settings or out of school schemes holding an overall inadequate 2 judgement. Childminders who have received an inadequate judgement are all at Inadequate 1 and are therefore not obliged to work with the Local Authority. However, in most cases support is welcomed and previously when the Local Authority has provided support, the provider has moved either to a satisfactory or good outcome on re-inspection.

The achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families.

Closing the attainment gap where poverty and disadvantage affect achievement is a priority for children of all ages in Wirral. Ofsted have specifically identified the key stage four as an area where further development is required.

The Narrowing the Gap Project was initiated in academic year 2010/11. All non-selective mainstream schools were included in the project. Schools were asked to identify 100 Year 11 pupils eligible for free-school meals who had a realistic chance of achieving 5+ A*-C including English and maths but were unlikely to do so without significant extra support over and above that already planned by the school.

A total of £120,000 was devolved to schools (£1,200 per pupil) to support extra intervention with the identified pupils. As a condition of the funding, each school was required to submit a plan outlining what strategies they planned to use with the target group, which would be shared with the other schools in the project. In addition, schools were required to submit termly updates of the pupils' progress, responses to the initiative, and predicted performance in the GCSE exams.

In December 2010 feedback from schools was that most pupils (over 80%) were responding well to the project and that approximately 40% of the identified pupils were on track to achieve 5+ A*-C including English and maths (the caveat being that pupil performance was variable and that these figures were indicative only at this stage).

In 2010 the attainment gap between Wirral's FSM and non-FSM pupils at Key Stage 4 was 36% (down from 38% in 2008), compared with the national average of 28%. If the schools have been successful in identifying the pupils accurately, their current projections hold, and there are no significant changes in performance of other pupils, the impact of the project on Wirral's gap would be to narrow it by a further 4% in 2011.

In addition to this specific targeted project schools and the Local Authority work in collaboration with all partners through the 14-19 partnership to monitor a range of activities designed to improve the achievement of vulnerable groups including those from low income families. Additional projects that are in place include:

- The implementation of a data training programme, including neighbourhood data, on the effects of poverty on achievement across the partnership.
- A range of intervention strategies to support under-achieving and under-attaining groups of pupils such as dissemination of Action Research and use of the National Narrowing the Gap programme.
- Ensure all schools know the extent of their attainment gap; monitor schools on their ability to 'close the gap' for children on FSM and other vulnerable groups.
- Make effective use of progression guidance to set accurate and challenging core subject targets for the lowest attaining pupils in the borough.
- Oversee the quality of 14-19 Partnership learning delivery through the Wirral Quality Assurance Framework.
- Work with schools to reduce the level of persistent absence.

Improve local arrangements for adoption.

The most recent Ofsted adoption inspection was held in 2008, Wirral received a satisfactory quality rating. The statutory requirements and the recommendations outlined in the inspection report have been addressed as follows:

- Improvements made in the quality of child permanence reports by providing training and support to social workers and the introduction of a quality assurance process before they are presented to the Adoption Panel.
- Record keeping has been improved with clear guidance given to staff about the contents of child's and adopters' files, training provided for staff on using ICS and a quality assurance system introduced.
- A recruitment strategy has been recently reviewed to ensure there is a sufficient pool of adopters that match the needs of the children requiring an adoption placement and changes made to the application process to comply with the standards.
- Improvements have been made within the adoption team to ensure that there are no delays in the progress of any adoption assessments and new systems implemented to improve the health and safety inspections.
- The Agency Advisor has regular meetings with the Agency Decision Maker to ensure that feedback from the panel is communicated and recommendations of the Adoption Panel are progressed to a decision.
- A system has been put in place to ensure that all staff working for the adoption service and members of the Adoption Panel are Criminal Record Bureau checked every 3 years.
- File audits are completed to ensure the quality of recording and record keeping complies with all the standards.

In addition developments to ensure continuous improvement are in place through the following activities:

- The Adoption Task Force was re-established in June 2009 with a remit to oversee continuous improvement in adoption services and post adoption support. This has more recently been extended to special guardianship and post special guardianship services.
- The Task Force monitors the service including the progress of individual children towards adoption, provides guidance on resolving any barriers to achieving adoption, and monitors an action plan that details improvements to be made for the service to meet the requirements of the adoption national minimum standards.
- The capacity of post-adoption support and services has been enhanced by the Council agreeing additional posts to develop and deliver these services.
- Permanence training has continued to be delivered; more than 80 staff members have been trained.
- Briefings have been held to improve the production of Child Permanence Reports.
- The Adoption Panel has delivered training with staff on how to secure children for adoption, through ensuring that information is sought and carefully recorded from the beginning of any involvement.

The service developments have had a significant impact on adoption outcomes. Timeliness of placements for adoption during 2009/10 Wirral performed better than national and Statistical neighbors during the same period with a year end figure of 87.5% or 21 out of 24 children adopted within 12 months. This is a significant improvement on

previous years; the 2008/09 outturn for this indicator was 61.1% or 11 out of 18 children adopted within 12 months.

4.0 Recommendations:

That Wirral Children's Trust Board note the report.

Appendix: Ofsted Annual Children's Services Assessment letter 2010.

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9 December 2010

Mr David Armstrong
Interim Director of Children's Services
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
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Dear Mr Armstrong

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.

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council continue to perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. There is very little inadequate provision. Nursery and primary settings are mostly good or better, as are nearly all secondary schools, special schools and the pupil referral unit. About one quarter of nursery and primary schools, however, are satisfactory. Childcare provision is good in two thirds of settings but this leaves approximately one third which is only satisfactory or worse. Most provision for learning after the age of 16 is good, including the further education college, but five settings made up of four sixth form schools and the sixth form college are satisfactory. Children's homes within the local authority are mostly good or better; of the three homes managed by the local authority, one is good and two are satisfactory. Local authority fostering arrangements are good but adoption arrangements are satisfactory. Nearly all services and settings are good or better at helping children and young people achieve well in their education and most at keeping them safe.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas requiring urgent action. Satisfactory action has been taken to address the issues identified in the inspection of private fostering arrangements in 2008.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes to be in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. This is also the case for educational attainment and progress indicators. Test and examination results for children and young people aged 11 and 16 years are good and in line with similar areas. These continue to improve year on year. At 11 years old children with special educational needs do better than their peers nationally and at 16 years old achieve in line with the national average. However, as more children and young people achieve better results, the gap between the majority and those from low-income families is getting wider. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training is reducing slowly in line with similar areas and more 17-year-olds stay on in training or education than in similar authorities.

Key areas for further development

- Improve early years and childcare settings so that more are good or better.
- Improve further the achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families.

- Improve the local arrangements for adoption.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful and do as well as those in similar areas. Nearly all schools and settings are good at this, although childminders do not do as well. Childhood obesity is being closely monitored by the local authority and levels recorded for reception age children have not increased over the past year. Obesity levels at Year 6, however, have increased slightly and reducing this continues to be a priority in the Children and Young People's Plan. Participation by children and young people in high quality sport is also a priority but take-up is lower than in similar areas and that found nationally. Wirral provides a good range of services to support children and young people with emotional or mental health difficulties is promoted actively in schools. Breast-feeding rates remain low in comparison to the national average but the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling steadily.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in most settings although adoption services do less well. Wirral is committed to ensuring children are safe at home, in the community and in schools, and this is a key priority in its Children and Young People's Plan. Partners working together have already had some success: for example, road traffic accidents that kill or seriously injure children have reduced, as have hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries. The local authority reports that good information and procedures are in place to respond to the needs of children missing from home and the recent inspection of front-line child protection services found that children at risk of harm are promptly identified and appropriately supported. Local children in need data show that good improvements have been made in reducing the number of child protection plans lasting for two years or longer and in ensuring looked after children have stable, long-term placements.

Most settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning but childcare provision is less so. Nearly all national measures show steady year-on-year improvement for the majority of children and young people. The local authority is good at helping the weakest schools improve and this is confirmed by recent monitoring reports to the five primary schools judged to be inadequate. Standards continue to rise in all stages of education, including early years and primary schools and, by the age of 16, more than half of young people gain five or more good GCSEs. One of the biggest challenges for the authority is how to continue to reduce the gap in achievement between the majority of its 16-year-old pupils and those who are from low-income families. Most secondary schools have good or outstanding standards of behaviour and frequent absence rates are low and reducing at a faster rate than elsewhere.

Wirral has a number of successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services. Children and young people from a range of backgrounds have contributed to discussions with the local authority on a variety of issues, such as transport as a barrier to getting involved in organised activities, and they have taken part in planning area-based youth 'hubs' and play spaces. An inspection in 2009 found re-offending rates by young people in the Wirral to be comparable with similar areas, and the youth offending service to be working reasonably well. Most young people who offend receive good support to find appropriate work or training. More young people report that they use alcohol or illegal substances more frequently than in similar areas and the local authority's commitment to reduce risk-taking behaviour is a key priority.

As they get older, young people get good support from the large majority of settings to do well as they move in to adult life. Effective partnership working between the local authority, colleges, and local businesses is a key strength and has provided increased choices for young people as they leave school. The numbers of young people who are not in education, work or training have reduced slowly and over time. The Wirral Apprentice scheme has recently placed 167 young people into suitable jobs, including a high percentage that had previously been without work or an education placement. The take-up of formal childcare by low-income families has increased year on year. Fewer young people from this group achieve higher qualifications by the time they reach age 19 although more are now achieving good GCSEs or equivalent. The numbers of care leavers in education, work or training are lower than the national average but most are helped to find suitable accommodation.

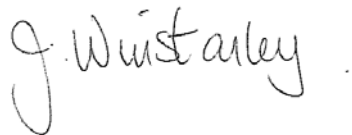
Prospects for improvement

Most outcomes for children and young people living in the Wirral are good and progress has been sustained and in some instances improved upon since last year. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan shows clearly where further progress is required and its priorities are well chosen. Initiatives to reduce child poverty are given high priority in plans, with a focus on employment. An Ofsted survey of 14–19 developments in Wirral judged strategic leadership and management to be strong. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found many strengths including good performance management and effective multi-agency work to support families with greatest need. In response to weaknesses in the local adoption service and inadequate private fostering arrangements identified by inspection the local authority made arrangements to review practice and procedures. Too much early years and childcare provision are only satisfactory. However, Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that

the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. Reducing the gap in achievement between the majority of young people and those from low-income families is a serious challenge which has been prioritised by the local authority.

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 style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment