

8 November 2011

Mr David Armstrong
Interim Director of Children's Services
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Children and Young People's Department
Hamilton Building, Conway Street
Birkenhead, Wirral
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Dear Mr Armstrong

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council perform excellently. In 2010 services were assessed as performing well. Good performance has been sustained and further improvement has been achieved in a number of areas. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and most provision effectively helps children and young people to learn and to stay safe. Seven secondary schools became academies during the year. Their last inspection judgements have been taken in to account for the 2011 assessment.

A recent inspection judged services for safeguarding and looked after children to be good with good capacity to improve and some outstanding features. The Ofsted report identifies the strong commitment demonstrated by the council and partners to protect the most vulnerable children and young people and improve services for looked after children.

Strengths

- Educational standards at all key stages in children and young people's lives are at least in line with similar areas and national averages. Progress at all stages has been steady over a four year period.
- The proportion of five-year-olds who demonstrate a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved year-on-year for all children including those from low-income families. The gap in achievement between this group and other children of the same age in Wirral has reduced significantly since last year and is narrower than in similar areas and nationally. The five children's centres recently inspected for the first time are good.
- The proportion of good and better primary schools has increased since 2010 and the very large majority are now good or outstanding. Only one school remains in an Ofsted category of concern. The latest Ofsted monitoring letter states that the support received from the local authority is good. A further three schools have made good progress and came out of a category this year. In 2011, the provisional national test results for 11-year-olds show further improvement on standards in 2010, which were in line with the national average and that for similar areas.
- The very large majority of secondary schools are good or outstanding. The attainment of 16-year-olds is above the average for similar areas and, although the gap in achievement for those from low-income families is wider than elsewhere, the most recent data shows some improvement, with more children from this group achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics than similar areas and

nationally. More children with special educational needs achieve good GCSEs than elsewhere. Most provision for children with special educational needs is good or outstanding.

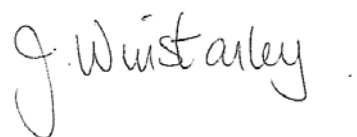
- The quality of post-16 education and training provision in the general further education college and sixth form schools is mostly good or better. The percentage of 19-year-olds achieving good GCSE or equivalent qualifications at level 2 continues to improve year-on-year, and the gap in achievement between those from low-income families and all other young people of the same age remains narrower than similar areas. A larger percentage of young people than elsewhere achieve higher level 3 qualifications equivalent to two A levels.
- The two local authority children's homes are good and this has improved since 2010. For services commissioned by the local authority the very large majority of children's homes are good or better, but one is inadequate. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are both good also showing improved performance since 2010.
- Services for safeguarding and looked after children's are good with some outstanding features. Leadership and management are outstanding, as are partnerships arrangements. Good systems are in place to ensure effective performance management and quality assurance. Children, young people and their carers are effectively engaged in designing and reviewing the range of services.

Areas for further improvement

- A large percentage of childminders and some registered day-care settings are only satisfactory. This is below performance in similar areas and has not improved since last year. A very small percentage of provision in childminding services is inadequate.
- Even though considerably more young people in Wirral achieve higher level qualifications by the age of 19 years than elsewhere, the gap in achievement between young people who are not from low-income families and those who are has increased and is wider than both the national attainment gap and that of similar areas for this age group.

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