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8 November 2011

Ms Joyce Thacker
Strategic Director for Children & Young People's Services
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
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Dear Ms Thacker

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.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately, as they did in 2010. The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall. The large majority of provision helps children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning and stay safe. Areas of strength and those identified for improvement remain largely the same as last year. However, the quality of local children's homes has improved and registered day-care provision also continues to improve. Previous inspection judgements for schools that have become academies have been taken into account in making this assessment.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found an area of strength, four areas for development and no areas for priority action. The areas of development identified at the previous unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in August 2009, and further considered in the full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in August 2010, were found to have largely been addressed.

Strengths

- As a result of improvements made to safeguarding, including front-line arrangements, the service was removed from Government intervention in January 2011. The local authority continues to seek further improvement by, for example, inviting a peer challenge team of children's services experts to look at local safeguarding of children and young people.
- There has been an improvement in the overall quality of early years and childcare provision since the last assessment, helped particularly by the increased number of registered day-care providers who are good or better. Six of the eight children's centres inspected are good and one is outstanding. However, the number of good childminders has not improved significantly and this was an area for development in 2010.
- The local authority continues to have a very large majority of provision in nursery and primary schools that are good or better for children under the age of five. Over the last four years, achievement at the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved at almost twice the rate of improvement found nationally and results since the last assessment have continued this positive trend.
- The number of 16-year-olds who achieve five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics continued to rise steadily until 2010 and is in line with similar areas and the national average. Provisional data for 2011 suggest this improvement has been maintained.

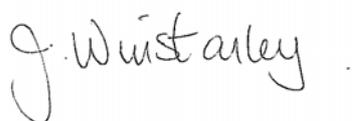
- The high quality of local authority provision in its special schools has been maintained and one of the three pupil referral units is now good, having previously been satisfactory. In 2010 all the local authority's children's homes were only adequate but this year three of the five homes are good which shows encouraging progress.
- There is almost no inadequate provision in the local authority and monitoring visits to schools that are, or have been, in an Ofsted category of concern show that the local authority provides effective and varied support which is helping to bring about good improvement.
- The recent inspection of youth offending services identified good outcomes in the key areas of performance inspected.

Areas for further improvement

- Only a third of Early Years Foundation Stage children from low-income families show a good level of development compared to their peers. This is below the national average and the gap between these children and others in Rotherham has widened slightly this year. This is disappointing given the significant rise in standards overall at this age. However, recent provisional data from the local authority suggest that outcomes for this group of children have improved in 2011 and that the gap has narrowed.
- Educational standards reached by children at the age of 11 remain too low. They are well below similar areas and the national average, as are progression rates between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics. Provisional Key Stage 2 results for 2011 show that results improved only marginally.
- The proportion of secondary schools and secondary school sixth forms that are good or better remains too low. At Key Stage 4, the gap in achievement between all pupils and those from low-income families is not reducing.
- By the age of 19 too few young people achieve level 3 qualifications in comparison with the national average. Although the gaps in achievement by the age of 19 between all students and those young people from low-income families have reduced over time, the trend is not consistent.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment