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Dr Sonia Sharp
Executive Director, Children Young People and Families
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Dear Dr Sharp

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.

Sheffield City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Sheffield City Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall. The very large majority of provision helps children and young people stay safe and to do well and enjoy their learning. Areas of strength are similar to last year and there have been some improvements, although the quality of secondary school sixth forms is not quite as strong as in 2010. A previous inspection judgement for a secondary school that is now an academy has been taken into account in making this assessment.

An announced inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in October 2010 found that both safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children were adequate. A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found two strengths, one area for development and no areas for priority action. The areas for development identified in the previous unannounced inspection of child protection services have all been addressed.

Strengths

- The proportion of childminders and registered day-care providers that are good or better has improved since 2010 and the large majority of children's centres are good.
- For children under the age of five, the large majority of provision in nursery and primary schools remains good or better and achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with similar areas and the national average.
- Both academies are now satisfactory, having been inadequate in previous inspections, and the quality of local authority secondary schools overall has improved well. In 2010 only half of Sheffield's secondary schools were found to be good or better and this was identified as an area for development. This year the proportion has improved to more than two-thirds.
- The local authority provides good support to schools that are, or have been, in an Ofsted category of concern. Monitoring visits to these schools show the local authority provides good support and a number of schools have made significant improvement over the last year.
- Eight of the local authority's 10 special schools are now outstanding as are two of the three secondary special school sixth forms. All pupil referral units remain good or better.

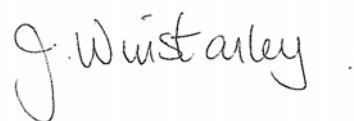
- Other specialist provision in Sheffield is of a high standard. Both the local fostering and adoption agencies are good and the quality of both local authority and private and voluntary children's homes has improved, with the result that the very large majority of all children's homes are good. The large majority of the provision the local authority commissions elsewhere is good or better.
- Published indicators for educational attainment show a very large majority to be in line with both similar areas and the national average. This is the case at the age of 16 and by the age of 19 and there continues to be a sustained trend of improvement, including for young people gaining level 3 qualifications by this age.

Areas for further improvement

- Education standards for 11-year-olds, although continuing to improve at a faster rate than found nationally until 2010, are below the national average but in line with similar areas. Provisional data for 2011 suggest that, as nationally, the rise in standards has stalled. There is room for further improvement to reduce the one-third of primary schools that are only satisfactory.
- Although there is no inadequate post-16 provision, there is not enough that is good or better for young people in Sheffield. A focused monitoring visit to the satisfactory local further education college judged that it was making at least reasonable, and in some cases significant, progress in addressing areas from its previous inspection. A similar visit to the satisfactory local sixth form college found it was making largely reasonable progress.
- Achievement gaps between children and young people from low-income families and their peers in Sheffield do not show an overall trend of narrowing. This is true at the age of five and 16 and by the age of 19 for level 3 qualifications.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment