

9 December 2010

Ms Joyce Thacker
Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
1st Floor, Norfolk House
Walker Place, Rotherham
South Yorkshire S65 1AS

Dear Ms Thacker

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.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
--------------------------------	-------------------------

Children's services in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in August 2009 found three areas for priority action which limited the 2009 children's services rating to inadequate. An inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children in July 2010 reported that services were satisfactory and noted a number of improvements. The judgement of adequate for the whole of its children's services acknowledges the work that has taken place in Rotherham to bring about these improvements.

Only a minority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Five of the six special schools are outstanding. Two-thirds of primary schools perform well although a few schools are inadequate. However, too many services and settings are only satisfactory, for example pupil referral units, the sixth form college and nearly half of childminders and secondary schools. The local adoption agency is good but the local fostering agency and all the children's homes for those in care are only satisfactory.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. Outcomes are not as strong for achieving economic well-being. Results in national tests are below similar areas for 11-year-olds and comparable with other areas at the age of 16. Gaps in achievement for pupils with special educational needs remain too wide. Although 19-year-olds, including those from low-income families in Rotherham, do not gain as many qualifications as they should, results continue to improve and are similar to those in other areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve the outcomes for children at the end of primary school.
- Increase the number of good childminders.
- Maintain the momentum of improvement in social care services for children and young people, including the quality of children's homes.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives show mixed results. Nearly all types of school and the local authority fostering agency are good at this, although pupil referral units and children's homes do not do as well. Services for children with emotional or mental health difficulties have

improved and children in care have good access to these services. The number of children who are too overweight at the ages of five and 11 shows little improvement over time, although in 2009 there were better reductions than those in similar areas. Encouragingly, more children are now taking part in physical education and sport. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is not falling at a fast enough rate. Too few mothers are still breast-feeding their babies at six weeks and this number is not improving. The local authority and its partners have plans to improve this and have seen encouraging outcomes from the Maltby Linx Young Women's project.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are variable in quality. Inspection by Ofsted of childcare, schools and the local adoption agency show good outcomes, but performance is not good enough in pupil referral units and children's homes. The recent full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services noted the number of initial and full assessments carried out on time had improved. However, it also found that the quality of case planning, reviews and recording, including for children in need cases, was inadequate. Although practice was of an adequate standard overall, there remained some inconsistency in the work of social care teams. Recent data show improvements in the stability of placements for children in care and in the number of meetings to review plans for them. Children are generally safe within the community, and the number of admissions to hospital because of deliberate or accidental injury has reduced more than the national figure.

Most services and settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning but this is an area of weakness in the local adoption agency. Primary schools have maintained a good trend of improving how well children do at the end of their reception year at school. However, too few primary schools are helping children to reach high enough standards and, at the age of 11, children do not do as well in national tests as their peers elsewhere. The local authority has had variable success in its work to help all schools get better, although the number of primary schools reaching the expected standards improved again in 2009. Standards have risen in secondary schools and, by the age of 16, the number of young people who gain five or more good GCSEs is similar to that of their peers in other areas. Behaviour in secondary schools is not good enough and has not improved over time. However, the number of secondary pupils who are often absent from school is reducing at a faster rate than elsewhere.

Good arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services are in place. The local area carries out an annual lifestyle survey for children and young people in Year 5, Year 7 and Year 10. It also has a range of initiatives which include promoting community cohesion particularly in relation to children and young people from the Roma and Slovak communities, improving support for the Yemeni and Arab communities and trialling a restorative justice project with the police. The majority of services and other settings are good at involving young people in decision-making and activity in their communities, although this is not as strong in children's homes and the local adoption agency. The inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children found some good examples of involving children, including those with complex needs, in the design of

services. However it also found that, despite some good examples, children's views are not yet routinely heard at child protection conferences and this is acknowledged as an area for development. The rate of re-offending by young people in Rotherham is lower than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well. The number of young people offending for the first time has reduced significantly. Almost all those who do offend are found a suitable place to live. However, the number of those who receive a custodial sentence has continued to rise and is too high. Too few young people who have offended are in education, training or work.

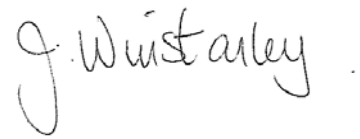
Future economic well-being is promoted well in special schools, the sixth form college and the local fostering agency but not as strongly in children's homes. Although the number of young people who gain qualifications by the age of 19 is low, there has been improvement over time. This year, after previous good reductions, there has been a rise in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training. However, recent data show improvements in both the numbers of care leavers in education, work or training and those who are given a suitable place to live when they leave care. The local authority knows more work is needed to improve the transition to education and training for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Prospects for improvement

As recognised in the recent inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children, and the inspection of fostering, the local authority has taken strong corporate action to bring about improvement. This was evident in performance management and arrangements for quality assurance. The good multi-agency partnership arrangements noted in the inspection of front-line child protection services were confirmed by the recent full inspection. Capacity for improvement was judged to be adequate. A number of new appointments have been made to strengthen senior management and there has been successful work to recruit and retain staff, although staffing levels for social workers continue to be a challenge and more work is needed to meet the training and development needs of staff. The Children and Young People's Plan notes a 17% increase in the number of children in care compared with 2% nationally. It also notes that this, and the 23% rise in the number of children who have child protection plans, have increased demands on the service. The new Children and Young People's Plan identified 'Transforming Rotherham Learning' as a key priority, and the local area will need to consider carefully how to successfully achieve its aims. The local authority's intention to reduce inequalities by narrowing the gaps for the most vulnerable is identified in the Corporate Plan. The School Forum has provided extra funding to strengthen school effectiveness work in primary schools. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. However, further work is needed to improve the number of pupils who achieve well at the end of primary school. Rotherham has demonstrated it can improve safeguarding and now needs to increase the amount of good provision in all services in the local area.

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' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment