

9 December 2009

Mr David Williams
Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UJ

Dear Mr Williams

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

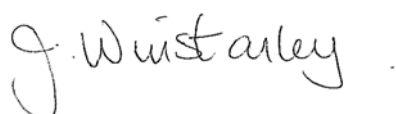
Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
-----------------------------------	--------------------------

Children's services in Durham County Council perform well.

A higher than average proportion of nursery and primary schools is good or outstanding and none have been judged to be inadequate. The proportion of secondary schools rated good or outstanding is smaller than in similar areas and that found nationally, although none are judged to be inadequate. Nine of the ten special schools are good and one is satisfactory; this is better than in similar areas. The pupil referral unit is also good. The proportion of children's homes that is good or better is smaller than in similar areas, with half of these judged as satisfactory. Performance of the council's fostering and adoption agencies is outstanding. The private fostering arrangements were inspected in Autumn 2007 and were rated inadequate at that time. Childminders and childcare settings are satisfactory overall. They do not do as well as similar areas or as seen nationally in being healthy and staying safe.

Performance against a large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is at least in line with similar areas and broadly in line with the national figure. Stability for looked after children is good and assessments are carried out within required timescales. Outcomes in schools are rising and the difference in the performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age is narrowing. Outcomes are more mixed for older young people. Many care leavers and young offenders are engaged in education, employment or training but the overall proportion of all 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in employment, education or training is above the average of similar areas.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

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, CAA