

When I became Leader in 2019, the Council's Children's Services were rated inadequate by Ofsted.

Every single child deserves the very best possible start in life, so the judgement was a shock and simply not acceptable. That's why as a council we made it our top priority to transform and improve the service, and since 2019 - with my fantastic Labour colleague Cllr Nova Charlton leading the way in Cabinet - there has been a huge amount of hard work by a huge amount of people.

It really has been a whole council mission to deliver the best Children's Services we can, and this week we are delighted to be able to confirm that Ofsted have rated us Good with services for care leavers being rated Outstanding.

I thank everyone involved including all elected members and particularly our amazing frontline social workers and staff led by Chief Executive Kath O'Dwyer, Executive Director Mark Palethorpe, and Director of Children's Services Hilary Brooks – all three, along with others, appointed since 2019 to help deliver better services.

We are all very proud that Ofsted have recognised our efforts but while a lot has been accomplished, there is more to do – we want the whole service to be 'Outstanding'.

The judgement gives us confidence that we are on the way to that, and it allows us to continue our improvement journey so that we can make even more of a positive difference for all children and young people in the borough.

I want children to be proud to be from St Helens, and to have a big say in its future. That's why we have committed to working towards Unicef Child Friendly Cities standard, and why we and our regeneration partners ECF are making every effort to engage schoolchildren in the plans for the town centre.

That's also why as a Labour council we've invested in new school buildings. I know everyone has been shocked to read reports in the press about schools crumbling, and I was relieved to learn that only the old Ashurst Primary has the dangerous concrete – and as many readers will know, our Labour council delivered a brand new Ashurst School earlier this year.

As on so many things, where the Tories fail, Labour deliver. We'll always put our children and young people first.

Best wishes to all Star readers.