Sonia the new children's choice

SHEFFIELD’S new head of Children and Young People’s Services is to be Dr Sonia Sharp, who currently holds a similar position in Rotherham.

Dr Sharp, aged 46, will replace Jonathan Crossley Holland in heading the council directorate.

Councillor lead Jan Wilson said: "We think she will be a great asset. She knows she has got a big job and she knows we want all our children to fulfil their potential."

"We are looking to her to put some energy into improving standards that we feel aren’t as good as we would like."

Dr Sharp has been strategic director for Children and Young People’s Services in Rotherham for three years.

Ironically, during the interview process in Sheffield, the department was highlighted as having the best children’s services in the country in the Local Government Chronicle Awards.

She said: "I’ve really enjoyed my time at Rotherham and I feel we have achieved a huge amount to ensure the borough’s children and young people achieve potential and get the best possible start in life."

"I’m determined to get to grips with the big challenges in Sheffield, particular around pupil attainment and the safeguarding of children."

"I know there are great people working in Sheffield City Council and in partner agencies and I relish the chance to work with them."

Her job in Sheffield sees her taking responsibility for services supporting schools, as well as children’s social care services, and support services for vulnerable children.

Having trained as an educational psychologist, Dr Sharp worked in Barnsley, Lincolnshire and Buckinghamshire before becoming assistant director for access and inclusion in Birmingham. She then moved on to become deputy chief executive of Education Leeds before taking the post in Rotherham.

Dr Sharp, who lives in Sheffield with her partner and their two children, is an internationally-renowned expert on bullying. She played an influential role in the so-called Sheffield Project, which was published as Don’t Suffer in Silence and formed the basis for a key Government strategy to tackle the problem of bullying in schools.

She will take up her Sheffield role – advertised with a £140,000 salary – in the summer.

She inherits a directorate that was shaped by Mr Jonathan Crossley Holland, and is making good progress in many respects. But there is still a huge gap between Sheffield’s results and the national average.

Her biggest challenge will be to improve primary performance – the city’s schools sink to their worst ever ranking in league tables last summer, coming 147th out of 150 education authorities.