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Mr Nick Hudson
Director of Children and Young People's Services
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Children and Young People's Service
Progress House, Westwood Park Drive
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Dear Mr Hudson

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.

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Wigan Metropolitan Borough 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 and provision helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. The areas of strength and areas for further improvement have not changed significantly since last year.

An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection was conducted in November 2010. This identified strengths in the partnership work between agencies and in the use of the common assessment framework. There were no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- Since last year, four of the 20 children's centres in Wigan have been inspected. One is good and the other three are outstanding. The reports highlight the very positive outcomes for these centres but they also point to a common need for better use of data to evaluate the impact of the work done.
- For children under five, the large majority of provision in nurseries and in primary schools is good or better; a situation that is very similar to last year. With good quality support from the local authority, the one inadequate setting is making satisfactory progress.
- As in 2010, the large majority of primary schools are good or better. The proportion of provision that is outstanding has increased to almost a quarter. One school that had been inadequate was recently judged to be satisfactory. The school that continues to be inadequate is receiving good support from the local authority.
- After a slight dip in 2009, the attainment of 11-year-olds has risen above the averages for similar areas and for England. Provisional figures for 2011 indicate that they continue to be above the national average.
- Of the 20 secondary schools open in the academic year 2010/11, 15 were good or better and five were outstanding. One school that was satisfactory and another that was inadequate closed in July 2011. However, the most recent inspection judgements on those schools contribute to the 2011 assessment of children's services. There is less persistent absence from secondary schools in Wigan than elsewhere in the country.

- Results for 16-year-olds achieving five A* to C, including English and mathematics, are in line with the averages nationally and for similar areas and, over the last five years, have improved at a faster rate than nationally.
- One special school has closed since last year. In the remaining six schools, provision has improved so that four of them are now outstanding, compared with three last year. Secondary special sixth form provision has also improved, with two of the three providers now being outstanding, compared to one out of three last year.
- Of the seven children's homes run by the local authority, four are good and one is outstanding. The remaining provision is satisfactory. Of the children's homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities, the large majority are good or better and none is inadequate.
- The local authority's adoption agency was re-inspected in September 2010 and continues to be good. Its fostering agency was inspected in 2008 and is also good.

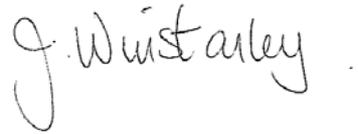
Areas for further improvement

- Since last year, early years and childcare provision has improved. The proportion that is good or better has increased and there is now no inadequate provision. However, over a third of settings are still no better than satisfactory.
- Despite the good provision in nurseries and primary schools, the achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has not risen for the last three years. Whereas previously it was better than the national average, it is now only in line with that average and with performance in similar areas.
- As in 2010, there continues to be too much variability in the quality of provision for education beyond the age of 16. The general further education college is good as is one secondary sixth form and one sixth form college but the remaining provision for this age group is only satisfactory.
- None of the local authority's pupil referral units is better than satisfactory. The reasons for this vary but, in two of the four units, attendance was identified as an area for improvement when they were last inspected.
- There is a continuing need to improve the attainment of secondary students who receive free school meals. The gap between their performance and that of others of the same age is now wider than in similar areas and nationally.

- Despite improvements, especially over the last two years, the proportion of 19-year-olds who achieve the equivalent of two passes at A level continues to be lower than the national average. However, the gap in achievement between 19-year-olds from low-income families and others of that age narrowed.

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