

9 December 2010

Ms Helen Denton  
Executive Director for Children and Young People  
Lancashire County Council  
PO BOX 61, County Hall  
Preston  
Lancashire PR1 8RJ

Dear Ms Denton

## 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.

## Lancashire County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Lancashire County Council perform well. This demonstrates good progress since 2009 when services performed adequately.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Nursery and primary schools are mostly good as are the special schools, pupil referral units and provision for young people after the age of 16. However, early years and childcare settings and secondary schools are not as good, with about one-third of all settings only satisfactory, and a minority of provision inadequate. The local authority arrangements for fostering and adoption are good. Nearly all the children's homes managed by the local authority are good or better. This has greatly improved since 2009. The very large majority of services and settings are good or better at helping children and young people stay safe and achieve well in their education.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action. The local authority's work to identify and monitor children in private fostering arrangements is good.

National performance measures show almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas as are all educational attainment and progress indicators. Results in national tests are broadly average for 11-year-olds. Children from low-income families and with special educational needs also do well when they first start schooling at five-years-old and at the age of 11, and the gap in attainment has narrowed for both groups over time. Sixteen-year-olds do as well as their peers in similar areas and standards continue to improve year-on-year. Fixed-term exclusions of young people in secondary schools have reduced however permanent exclusions are higher than national rates and rising. Nineteen-year-olds from low-income families gain as many good or higher level qualifications as those from similar backgrounds across the country and the latest outcome measures show some improvement.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve early years and childcare settings so that more are good or better.
- Improve secondary schools so that more are of a good or better standard.
- Reduce the rate of permanent exclusions from secondary schools.

## Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. All childcare settings, schools, children's homes and residential special schools are good at this, although independent boarding schools in the area do less well. Health outcomes overall have improved since 2009. Higher numbers of mothers are breast-feeding, more children are taking part in physical education and sport, and children's satisfaction with parks and play areas has increased. Fewer children are very overweight at the age of five and 11. Child and adolescent mental health services are still less well developed than the national average and the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is slightly higher than elsewhere although there has been a reduction over time. This remains a priority for the local authority.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in all settings with the exception of some childminder settings and boarding schools which are only satisfactory. The joint area review in 2008 judged safeguarding to be adequate. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found strong and creative partnerships to be working well to ensure that children whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable and young people are protected from risk of harm. A common multi-agency approach to assessing needs at a local level is helping increasing numbers of families receive support more quickly than previously. Local children in need data show some improvement in outcome measures, although referrals which go on to initial assessment are still below the national average. The quality of children's homes has improved and the local authority will only use private and voluntary placements where inspections have deemed them to be satisfactory or better. The numbers of children who are killed or seriously injured on the roads are reducing as are admissions to hospital due to unintentional or deliberate injury, although this reduction is from a higher level than elsewhere.

Nurseries, primary, secondary and sixth form schools are mostly good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The number of schools judged to be inadequate has reduced and the local authority has developed a range of strategies to help weaker schools to improve standards. Approximately one-third of secondary schools however are satisfactory. Provision in pupil referral units and special schools is mostly good. Standards at the start of school have improved and children do as well as their peers in similar areas in national tests at the age of 11, although girls have performed better than boys in the latest unvalidated results. Standards have also risen in secondary schools. By the age of 16, more young people gain five or more good GCSEs than those in similar areas. Young people with special educational needs do better than similar groups nationally, but those from low-income families do not do as well. Behaviour is good in most secondary schools and the numbers who are often absent are falling. The high number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools has been identified by the local authority as a major area of focus.

Consultation with children and young people is a key priority in Lancashire. The youth council has a high profile and is part of the local authority's decision-making structure. School councils are also very active and are involved in planning and reviewing services in their communities. The *Get it Loud* programme in libraries has successfully used creative ways to attract 14- to 19-year-olds to make use of the wide-ranging resources and this has received national acclaim. The numbers of young people who are offending for the first time are reducing faster than elsewhere. However, rates of re-offending are higher. Performance for young offenders who are helped to find appropriate work or training and are in suitable accommodation have improved and are above the England averages.

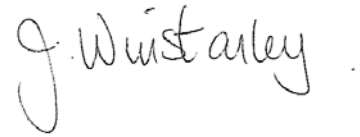
Young people receive good support to gain the skills and qualifications needed for future jobs and the numbers not in education, work or training are reducing steadily over time. Five of the seven further education colleges are good or better, the rest are judged to be satisfactory. The numbers of 17-year-olds in training or work have been sustained and are as good as those in similar areas. Young people gain good qualifications by the age of 19, including those from low-income backgrounds. There has also been a slight increase in numbers from this group going on to higher education and more low-income families take up childcare places than elsewhere. The numbers of care leavers finding suitable work or training are similar to that in comparable areas and there has been a slight improvement over the last year. The local authority and partners regard this as a key priority and 30 young people who are in the care of the local authority are currently on a supported apprenticeship scheme.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Most outcomes for children and young people are improving in Lancashire and children's services are now good. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan shows good progress in important areas and identifies areas for further improvement. For example, in one area where children are under-achieving a new trust has been established between three schools in partnership with local businesses, health providers and further education colleges. Early evidence shows that outcomes for children and young people are improving well. Monitoring and analysis of school performance are strong. The youth offending service is now working well and meeting targets. Health outcomes have improved since last year and the recent inspection of front-line child protection services found that senior managers were making good decisions and taking effective action to improve safeguarding services. Children's homes are now mostly good and work continues to bring those which are satisfactory up to the standard of the best. The local authority is aware that there is still work to be done to improve the amount of satisfactory provision across many of its settings, particularly in early years and childcare settings and in some secondary schools.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment