

9 December 2009

Mr Murray Rose  
Director of Children's Services  
Darlington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Feethams  
Darlington DL1 5QT

Dear Mr Rose

## 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

<b>Children's services rating</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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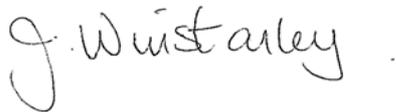
Children's services in Darlington Borough Council perform well.

The performance of the local authority's schools and settings is good overall. The proportion of nurseries that are good or better is greater than in similar local authorities and across the country as a whole. Similarly, an above average proportion of primary schools are good or better. Just over two thirds of childcare provision is good or better, although only about a half of childminders are good. Both school sixth forms are good and the proportion of secondary schools that are good or better is greater than national averages. The local General and Further Education and Tertiary College and Sixth Form College are both outstanding.

The quality of provision and services for children and young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable is mixed. The special school is good but one pupil referral unit is inadequate. The joint area review identified that services for young people looked after by the local authority are good. However, one of the local authority's four children's homes is inadequate, two are adequate and one is good. The inspection judgement of the local authority's fostering agency is that it is good but private fostering arrangements are inadequate, mostly because of poor maintenance of accurate records and not meeting regulations. The adoption agency is adequate. The joint area review identified good provision for safeguarding.

Performance on national indicators is mixed. The local authority does well in some areas of staying safe and enjoying and achieving. For example, completion of assessments and reviews is timely. However, an above average number of children and young people are admitted to hospital with unintentional and deliberate injuries. The percentage of referrals concerning children in need going on to initial assessment is below average. The stability of long-term placements for looked after children is also low but recent data show improvement. Attendance at school is good and rates of exclusion from school are average. Examination results overall have improved and are better than in similar authorities at age 11 and match the average at age 16. Inequalities gaps in educational achievement remain. For example, pupils with special educational needs do less well than in similar areas and fewer young people from low income backgrounds achieve a level 2 or level 3 qualification by age 19. Overall outcomes by age 19 are average and more 16- to 18-year-olds are in education, employment or training than in 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