

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 618 8207  
Direct F 0161 618 8154  
North\_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Peter Morgan  
Director of Children's Services  
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council  
East Wing Floor 2  
The Exchange  
Ainsworth Street  
Blackburn BB1 6AD

Dear Mr Morgan

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council 2008**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

## Overall effectiveness of children's services

## Grade 3

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council consistently delivers good services and makes an effective contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. All outcome areas are judged to be good. Of particular note are the improved attainments of children, including looked after children or those from Pakistani heritage backgrounds. Overall, the percentage of young people attaining five GCSEs A\* to C has risen from 52.7% in 2006 to 61.2% in 2007. The percentage attaining this figure including English and mathematics has also risen and now stands at 44.7%. Both these figures for 2007 are in line with national averages and higher than statistical neighbours. In addition, effectively targeted good support for schools and settings through partnership working has enhanced their overall improvement resulting in Ofsted judging 72% of schools as good or better since September 2005. This, too, is higher than the council's statistical neighbours. An important contribution in ensuring children and young people stay safe is the well-managed child protection system which ensures all cases are reviewed on time and prompt action is taken to cease registration where appropriate.

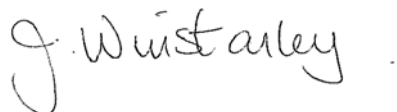
The 2008 APA has raised a small number of areas for development concerning looked after children. Nonetheless, these are relative weaknesses owing to small cohorts and there have been improvements since the 2007 APA. For example, while the proportion of looked after children receiving a final warning, reprimand or conviction remains higher than in similar councils, the 2008 figure represents a reduction from 2007 and is within acceptable bounds.

The council's children's and young peoples' services are led and managed well. Engagement with children and young people is at the heart of the council's work. Plans are clear and demonstrate strong ambition and prioritisation, for example, in coordinated plans to tackle poverty, while good capacity to improve further is evidenced by effective multi-agency working. Joint funded posts are leading the strategic development of those services aimed at supporting young people's general, sexual and emotional health including substance misuse. The council has made good progress in dealing with the areas for development identified in the 2007 APA. For example, there are greater opportunities for minority ethnic groups to engage with the council. Progress in one area for development has not been achieved, namely to introduce restorative justice practices for looked after children and young people in order to reduce the number who may offend. Work in this area is still in progress. Nonetheless, the council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is consistent with the evidence. There are no additional recommendations to make as a result of the APA.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

We are grateful for the information you provided as part of this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues in preparing for the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection

## Major strengths and important weaknesses

Major strengths	Important weaknesses and areas for development
<p><b>Being healthy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High rates of breast-feeding.</li> <li>▪ Teenage conceptions continue to fall faster than nationally.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Being healthy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The relatively high levels of hospital admissions due to alcohol misuse.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Staying safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Almost all reviews of looked after children are within timescales and performance is above average compared with similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ Multi-agency early intervention and preventative services coordinated through the children's centres across the borough identify and meet needs locally.</li> <li>▪ The success of the 'Engage' project in supporting young people at risk of sexual exploitation and in tackling offenders.</li> <li>▪ The well developed common assessment framework, and robust referral and assessment systems within the social care service.</li> <li>▪ The child protection system is well managed with all cases reviewed on time and prompt action is taken to cease registration as appropriate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Staying safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The high rate of looked after children including a very high proportion placed with parents compared with other councils.</li> <li>▪ The long term stability of looked after children where performance is below average compared with similar councils and nationally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enjoying and achieving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good targeted, focused support and partnerships with schools and settings contributes well to strong early years child care access and provision, Intensive Support Programme (ISP) outperforming other such schools nationally and 72% of schools judged by Ofsted to be good or better.</li> <li>▪ Continued improvement in rates of attainment and progress measures at Key Stages 2 and 3 and at GCSE, including: looked after children at Key Stage 2; care leavers aged 16 and over attaining at least one GCSE A* to G/GNVQ; and Pakistani heritage pupils at GCSE.</li> <li>▪ Improved attendance at both primary and secondary schools.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Enjoying and achieving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ While still better than average, there has been a 1.5% rise in looked after children of school age missing a total of 25 days of schooling during the previous school year.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Significant reduction of fixed term exclusions from special schools from 55.16% in 2005 to 2.63% in 2007.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Making a positive contribution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Almost all schools inspected by Ofsted were judged to be good in the extent to which learners were enabled to make a positive contribution in their community. This is better than average compared with similar councils.</li> <li>▪ Children and young people are encouraged well to participate in decision making and to support the community.</li> <li>▪ Reduction in numbers of first time entrants to the youth justice system and the rate of re-offending.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Making a positive contribution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proportion of looked after children receiving a final warning, reprimand or conviction remains higher than in similar councils.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of looked after children attending their annual reviews (89%) is below that found in similar council areas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Achieving economic well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continued effective collaboration, including good use of the outstanding local further education college, specialist school and centres of vocational excellence, has led to good progress in developing the 14 to 19 curriculum, including Diplomas.</li> <li>▪ Good levels of achievement. For example, the percentage of young people gaining Level 2 and Level 3 at age 19 is above statistical neighbours and rising, and NVQ success rate for all work-based learners is in line or higher than national averages in all characteristics.</li> <li>▪ Strong levels of support for most vulnerable groups.</li> <li>▪ Proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training has fallen to below national averages and statistical neighbours in 2006-7.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Achieving economic well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The number of young people aged 19 not in employment, education or training is rising.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capacity to improve including the management of children's services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific, measurable, achievable and time bound plans that are clear in ambition and priority, for example to tackle poverty.</li> <li>▪ Good capacity created through multi-agency working.</li> <li>▪ Good levels of engagement with children and young people.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Capacity to improve including the management of children's services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The 2007 APA area for development to introduce restorative justice practices for looked after children and young people in order to reduce the number who may offend has not yet been achieved.</li> </ul>