

9 December 2009

Ms Gladys Rhodes
Director of Children's Services
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
The Exchange
Ainsworth Street
Blackburn
BB1 6AD

Dear Ms Rhodes

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

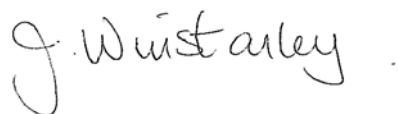
Children's services rating	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council perform excellently.

The overall effectiveness of the very large majority of regulated and inspected services and settings is good or better. Children get off to a good start in nearly all childcare settings and nursery education and in most instances continue to do very well throughout their education. All education settings, with the exception of special schools, demonstrate performance above that of similar areas and seen nationally. The outcome of a large majority of school inspections is good or better; a greater proportion than found in similar areas and nationally. No schools are inadequate. Other specialist provision and services for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable are good or better overall. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good. All the authority's children's homes are good or better and their performance is above those in similar areas and the national picture. The joint area review, published in January 2009, found services for looked after children and safeguarding arrangements to be good. However, two out of three serious case reviews have recently been judged to be inadequate.

Performance against the large majority of national indicators, including staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with similar areas and national averages. The performance of children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable is improving and in most aspects the gap between their performance and that of others is narrower than in similar areas and found nationally. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training has reduced year on year and is now better than similar areas, although those children and young people who offend are less likely to be in suitable employment or training.

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.



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA