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Mrs Margaret Asquith
Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mrs Asquith

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.

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. In 2010, they were assessed as performing adequately. Since then, there have been marked improvements in key areas of provision particularly in secondary schools. The large majority of the providers inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and help children and young people to stay safe and enjoy their learning. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and more schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection took place in July 2011. The report identified strengths in the highly effective use of a range of specialist resources to support families and the provision of very effective support for staff. There were no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- As in 2010, the very large majority of provision for children under five in nurseries and in primary schools is good or better. None of it is inadequate and there has been a slight increase in the proportion of providers who are outstanding. After a dip in 2009, the achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved and is now above the averages nationally and for similar local authorities. The achievement gap between five-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has fluctuated and, in the last two years, has widened.
- There has been a distinct improvement in the quality of secondary school provision. Last year, less than half of the secondary schools were good or better. Since then, three schools that were satisfactory have been re-inspected and judged to be good. With strong support from the local authority, another that was inadequate has now progressed to being satisfactory, with good capacity for further improvement. As a result, the large majority of secondary schools are now good or better and none of them is inadequate. Since last year, one satisfactory school has closed and re-opened as an academy. This has not yet been inspected. Persistent absence from secondary schools has continued to fall and is lower than in similar areas.
- One of the special schools run by the local authority has recently been re-inspected and continues to be outstanding. Therefore, the overall performance remains as for 2010, with four schools being outstanding and the other two being good. Since last year, three of the pupil referral units

have closed, including one that was inadequate and another that was satisfactory. Of the four that remain, three are outstanding. One of these is the provision for young mothers.

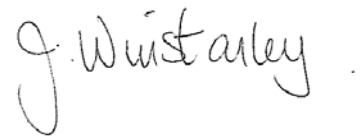
- The local authority's adoption and fostering agencies have not been re-inspected recently. Therefore, their ratings remain good, as in 2010.
- The local authority's six children's homes have improved since last year, with the number of outstanding providers rising from two to four. Both providers that were satisfactory are now good. The large majority of the children's homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities are good or better and none of them is inadequate.
- Attainment at the age of 11 is in line with national averages, as is the proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining two or more GCSE grades A* to C in science subjects is above the averages nationally and for similar areas. After widening for four years, the attainment gap between 16-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed.
- The local authority has made considerable strides in reducing the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training. The rate of improvement over the last two years has been twice the average for similar areas.

Areas for further improvement

- Since last year, the proportion of early years and childcare providers that are good or better has increased. However, over a third are still no better than satisfactory. Some of the day-care provision is now inadequate. Two children's centres have been inspected during the year and are satisfactory. Both reports identified a need to make greater contact with a wider range of children and families.
- There has been a slight increase in the proportion of primary schools that are good or better. With the very strong support of the local authority, the number of inadequate schools has been reduced to one. However, like last year, over a third of primary schools are still no better than satisfactory.
- As in 2010, there are no outstanding providers of post-16 education and most of the sixth form provision is only satisfactory. The proportion of 19-year-olds who gain two A level passes or the equivalent is in line with averages nationally and for similar areas. However, there are more 16- to 18-year olds who are not in work, education or training than in similar areas.

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