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Mr Mark Carriline
Acting Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
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Dear Mr Carriline

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.

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Bury Metropolitan Borough Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of provision is good or better overall and helps children and young people to learn and stay safe. The strengths and areas for further improvement are very similar to last year.

An unannounced inspection was recently conducted of the contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection. This found strengths in partnership working and in the development of information systems. It also identified areas for development but there were no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- For children under five, the very large majority of the provision made by nursery and primary schools is good or better. This is very similar to last year. Since then, the number of inadequate settings has fallen from three to one. This setting is subject to special measures but, with the continuing, helpful support of the local authority, it is making satisfactory progress.
- Over three-quarters of primary schools are good or better and, since last year, the number of inadequate schools has fallen from four to one. With support, including that of the local authority, this school is making satisfactory progress.
- As in 2010, the very large majority of secondary schools are good or better, although there has been a slight change. Last year, 13 of the 14 schools were good or better with the remaining one being satisfactory. This year, two of the schools are satisfactory. Of these, one has good capacity and the other satisfactory capacity to improve.
- Provision for education beyond the age of 16 is outstanding. The further education and sixth form college have not been re-inspected since last year. In their most recent inspections, both providers were found to be outstanding in each of the aspects on which they were assessed.
- The three special schools run by the local authority have not been re-inspected since last year. Therefore, provision remains outstanding, as in 2010. When they were last inspected, all three schools were judged to be outstanding in every aspect on which they were assessed. Inspectors highlighted how the strong leadership and excellent support and guidance provided by the schools ensure that the children and young people for whom they are responsible make very good progress.

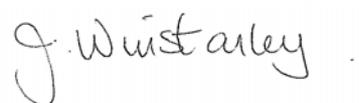
- The local authority commissions places from children's homes outside the area. All the providers it uses are good or better.
- The very large majority of educational outcomes are at least in line with those in similar areas and across the country. Provisional figures for 2011 indicate that results for 11-year-olds have risen to their highest level in five years. The proportion of 16-year-olds who achieve grades A* to C in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, is higher than in similar areas and across the country. The gap in attainment between 16-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has fluctuated over the last five years but, apart from one year, has been narrower than in similar areas and across the country.
- The percentage of looked after children achieving grades A* to C in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics, is higher than the averages nationally and for similar areas.

Areas for further improvement

- Despite recent improvements, only just over a half of early years and childcare providers are better than satisfactory. Of the six children's centres inspected, only two are better than satisfactory. The one centre that is inadequate has not focused on the key issues that will improve the life chances and well-being of the families in the community that it serves. Therefore it also has inadequate capacity to improve.
- The local authority's adoption and fostering agencies have not been re-inspected since 2009 when they were both judged to be satisfactory.
- There is a continuing need to close the gap between the achievement of 16-year-olds with special educational needs and others of the same age. The gap has narrowed over the last two years but has widened over five years and is currently wider than in similar areas and across the country.
- The achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is below the averages nationally and for similar areas. The rate of improvement over the last four years has been far less than across the country. The gap in achievement between five-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has fluctuated. It is currently narrower than in similar areas but wider than the average nationally.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment