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8 November 2011

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

Dear Ms Rhodes-White

## 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.

## Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are judged good or better and provision helps children and young people learn and stay safe. There is very little inadequate provision and most settings have maintained good or better performance. One good local authority secondary school with a good sixth form converted to an academy in 2011 and the two judgements have been taken into account in the this assessment. Main strengths remain similar to last year and areas identified for improvement have also not changed significantly; standards at the Early Years Foundation Stage and at the age of 16 have improved as has some provision in early years settings, two local authority children's homes and two independent special schools.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found three main strengths, many aspects that meet statutory requirements and four areas for development. Successful multi-agency working and the co-location of multi-agency staff within first response and duty teams are highlighted as particularly strong features of the services. The majority but not all of the concerns identified for development in the last inspection in 2010 have been addressed.

### Strengths

- Provision for very young children in early years and childcare is good in the large majority of settings and this has improved slightly since last year. Three of the four children centres inspected for the first time are good or better.
- Standards achieved by very young children at the Early Years Foundation Stage improved well last year and are above those achieved in similar areas. Children of this age group from low-income families also do well and better than elsewhere. The gap in achievement between these children and others of the same age in Blackburn with Darwen is narrowing and the trend over four years has been consistently positive.
- The overall effectiveness of the large majority of nurseries and primary schools is good or outstanding. One nursery school has recently moved out of a category of concern. The local authority provides good support, challenge and guidance to help schools tackle weaknesses. Looked after children at the age of 11 perform better than their peers in similar areas and nationally.

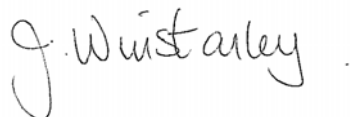
- As last year, seven of the nine maintained secondary schools are good or better. The proportion of 16-year-olds achieving at least five A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics has risen steadily and is now in line with similar areas and nationally. The gap in achievement for 16-year-olds from low-income families is narrower than elsewhere. There has been consistent improvement in the performance of pupils with special educational needs who achieved at least five good GCSEs. Levels of achievement for pupils of Asian heritage are as good or better than all pupils of the same age in Blackburn with Darwen and the gap is reducing at a faster rate than in similar areas. The persistent absence rate of secondary school pupils is lower than similar areas and reducing year on year.
- Provision for young people staying on in education is good or better in nearly all settings. As in 2010, the general further education college is judged outstanding and the sixth form college is good. Standards achieved by young people by the age of 19 reflect consistently strong performance over three years and are better than the national average. More students from low-income families achieve level 2 and level 3 qualifications than elsewhere and the gap between these groups and their peers in similar areas and nationally are at least in line. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 years who are not in education, employment or training is lower than similar areas and this continues to reduce at a faster rate than in similar areas.
- All local authority children's homes are at least good as is the quality of the services commissioned by the local authority for looked after children and young people. The overall effectiveness of the local authority adoption agency is judged outstanding and the fostering agency is good. Performance of services for looked after children have improved overall since 2010.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Too much childminder provision is only satisfactory.
- Two primary schools are in special measures and recent Ofsted monitoring letters identify satisfactory progress.
- Key areas for development remain in the contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may need protection. These include the variable quality of assessments which had not been suitably addressed in the first unannounced inspection in 2010, high level of repeat referrals and high caseloads for some social workers in the first response and duty teams.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment