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Mr David Lund
Executive Director of Children's Services
Blackpool Borough Council
Children and Young People's Department
Progress House, Clifton Road
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Dear Mr Lund

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.

Blackpool Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Blackpool Borough Council perform well. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and nearly all provision helps children stay safe and to learn. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011, with good improvement in the overall effectiveness of early years and childcare settings and children's homes. Main strengths remain similar to last year and there has been some progress in the key areas for further development identified in the assessment letter from 2010.

In 2011, Ofsted's unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection reported no priority actions, one main strength and four areas for development, three of which were identified in the previous inspection in 2009, namely: high caseloads for some social workers, timescales for completion of core assessments and on-going concerns regarding the local authority's electronic recording system

Strengths

- For very young children and those of primary school age, provision in the large majority of early years, childcare, nursery and primary school settings is good. This performance has been largely sustained, although with a small increase in the number of primary schools that are now judged satisfactory. Three of the four children's centres recently inspected are judged outstanding and one is good.
- Educational standards fluctuate over time but the picture overall is of sustained improvement and from a low base at the age of five, 16 and 19 years. Standards remain below average for five-year-olds but these show good improvement in 2010 and the gap between children from low-income families and all other children of the same age in Blackpool is narrowing faster than elsewhere. Provisional results for 2011 show standards in national tests for 11-year-olds have risen slightly which, in 2010, were in line with similar areas but below the national average. Girls continue to do better than boys.
- For 16-year-olds, the numbers achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics are increasing, though still well below the national average, and the gap between those from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed over the last four years. More young people with special educational needs are now achieving these higher grades than in 2009, and the gap with all other pupils of the same age in Blackpool although widening continues to be smaller than in similar areas and nationally.

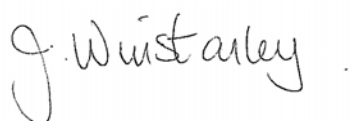
- Of the three institutions providing learning after the age of 16, all are judged good or outstanding. Attainment at the age of 19 is better than similar areas and in line with the national average, an improving trend for those achieving level 2 qualifications which are the equivalent to five higher grade GCSEs. The gap in achievement at this level between those young people from low-income families and others of the same age has widened slightly since last year. More 19-year-olds are achieving higher level qualifications than last year, though still fewer than the national average, and the gap between those from low-income families and the rest remains narrower than similar areas and nationally.
- As in 2010, with the exception of one satisfactory independent special school, all provision for special education and at the pupil referral unit is judged good or outstanding.
- Local authority adoption and fostering services for looked after children continue to be judged good. All the local authority children's homes are judged good or better, as are the very large majority of those private and voluntary homes commissioned by the local authority, with more that are outstanding this year than in 2010. There is no inadequate provision.

Areas for further improvement

- Too many secondary schools, five out of eight, are still judged only satisfactory and one is inadequate and has a notice to improve. Monitoring by Ofsted shows that teaching and learning are improving and the local authority is providing good support to schools which need to improve. Recent inspections judged one secondary school as good for its overall effectiveness and capacity to improve, although another remained satisfactory. Persistent absence in secondary schools, though reducing year on year, continues to be worse than in similar areas.
- Fewer care leavers are in education, employment or training by the age of 19 than in similar areas and numbers have declined sharply since 2009.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment