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Mr John Collings
Executive Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mr Collings

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.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council perform excellently. The local authority has sustained its good performance of 2010 and made further notable improvements, particularly in the quality of schools and post-16 provision. The very large majority of inspected settings, services and institutions help children and young people stay safe and learn well. In addition to the improvement of schools, there are also now more good children's homes and childcare settings than in 2010. The most recent inspection judgements for schools that have become academies have been taken into account in making this assessment.

The inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection which took place in November 2010 found two strengths, many areas that meet requirements and a number of areas of development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention.

Strengths

- Provision in early years and childcare improved in 2011 and very little is inadequate. The three children's centres inspected provide good support to very young children and their parents or carers. The very large majority of nursery provision is good or outstanding. Children make good progress in their levels of development. Over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved significantly, including for children from low-income families and the gap between them and the average for the majority of children of the same age in Newcastle is closing.
- Primary schools remain mostly good or better, as they were in 2010. The local authority provides effective support to schools in an Ofsted category of concern and only one primary school is now inadequate. Monitoring visits to this school show that it is making good progress. Results at Key Stage 2 for 11-year-olds have improved year on year and match those for similar local authorities. However, provisional Key Stage 2 results for 2011 show a slight drop.
- The majority of secondary schools, including academies, are good or better. Over the past four years, results for 16-year-olds have improved at a faster rate than nationally. They match the average of similar local authorities and the 2011 provisional GCSE results show further improvement. Significantly in 2010, the proportion of 16-year-olds from low-income families who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics improved and matched similar areas.

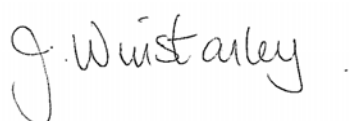
- Post-16 education and training providers are making a positive contribution to raising standards and more 17-year-olds than in similar areas stay in education or training. The majority of post-16 provision is good or outstanding. The proportion of 19-year-olds from low-income backgrounds attaining a level 2 qualification has risen. The gap in attainment between these young people and the majority of the same age in Newcastle has reduced over the past few years and is narrower than the national attainment gap. This is less marked at level 3 qualifications, however overall, a higher proportion of young people than the national average progress to higher education.
- There are strengths in specialist services. The pupil referral unit and most special schools, including the special school sixth forms, are at least good. For looked after children, the adoption and fostering agencies remain consistently good or outstanding. The quality of the children's homes has been improved further and six of the seven children's homes are now good or better and one is satisfactory.

Areas for further improvement

- The November 2010 unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found that prompt action has been taken to address most of the areas for development identified at the January 2010 inspection of these arrangements. However, the areas for development concerning the variability in the quality of assessments and ensuring that children's views are central to these assessments are yet to be addressed fully.
- Improving secondary school attendance was an area for development identified in the 2010 children's services assessment. Recent local authority data show that progress has been made and persistent absence from secondary schools is reducing. However, the 2010/11 Newcastle Children's Trust performance report confirms that, despite progress, this issue remains a priority for Newcastle as, overall, absence rates remain higher 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



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment