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Mr Paul Moffat  
Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Northumberland County Council  
Children's Services Directorate  
County Hall  
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Dear Mr Moffat

## 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.

## Northumberland County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Northumberland County Council perform well. This good performance has been maintained since 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions for children and young people are good or better overall and the very large majority are good at helping children and young people to stay safe, enjoy their learning and achieve well. Universal provision is good overall, including the very large majority of primary schools and the majority of secondary schools, although just over a third of secondary provision is only satisfactory.

The most recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection in July 2011 found two strengths and much that is satisfactory. No areas require urgent remedial action. The two areas of development identified at the previous inspection in July 2010 have been addressed.

### Strengths

- For children under five, the large majority of early years and childcare settings are good or outstanding. The very large majority of children's centres inspected are good and provide effective support to very young children and families. The very large majority of nurseries are good or outstanding. Children are well prepared for school and, over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved. They are now better than those of similar areas, including children from low-income families.
- A high proportion of primary schools are good or outstanding. The primary school and middle school in an Ofsted category of concern are making satisfactory progress. The support provided by the local authority is effective and well targeted to improve the quality of provision. Over the past year, one first school has improved from inadequate to good and one previously inadequate middle school is now satisfactory.
- One residential special school has improved from satisfactory to good and almost all special schools, including special school sixth forms, are good or better, as they were in 2010. The pupil referral unit is also good as is the local authority adoption agency.
- The provision for post-16 learning is mostly good. Nine of the 14 school sixth forms are good or outstanding and five are satisfactory. The independent specialist college is good. Outcomes are improving and the proportion of 19-year-olds with a level 2 or a level 3 qualification matches similar local authorities. Results at these levels are also rising for young

people from a low-income background and the attainment gap between them and all young people in Northumberland is narrowing.

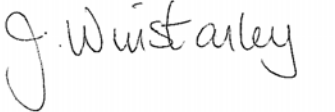
- An Ofsted survey of commissioning arrangements for young people's services identified several areas of good practice, including effective collaboration, which supports well the work of some key voluntary and community sector organisations. The Northumberland youth offending service performance report, dated September 2011, shows that this service performs well. Fewer young people offend and the large majority of those who do are in education, work or training.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Although the majority of provision for looked after children, including that run by private providers or other local authorities is good, one of the four children's homes run by Northumberland County Council is currently inadequate. The fostering agency is satisfactory.
- Despite children starting school with above average levels of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the progress they make from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics is below average. The local authority self-assessment shows that where the results have deteriorated, the school is either closing or there is a new leadership in place. It also shows that the 2011 Key Stage 2 provisional results for looked after children and children with special educational needs show improvement. Nonetheless, results at Key Stage 2 have remained below the average of similar areas for a number of years and provisional results for 2011 do not show improvement.
- Provision for secondary schooling is mixed, and too much is now only satisfactory, even when the two academies are taken into account. Results overall, for the proportion 16-year-olds achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics match similar areas. However, over the past four years, the rate of improvement has been slower than the national average. Provisional GCSE results for 2011 show further improvement.
- As reported in 2010, the proportion of 16-year-olds from a low-income background who achieve five good GCSEs including English and mathematics, although improving, is below the average of similar local authorities and the gap in attainment between these young people and others of the same age in Northumberland has been consistently wider than in similar areas for the past three years. Although the 2011 GCSE national results have not been published, local authority data show that progress has been made in raising the achievement of looked after young people and, this year, an increasing number achieved five good GCSEs including English and mathematics.

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