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8 November 2011

Ms Margaret Whellans  
Director of Learning and Children  
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Regent Street  
Gateshead  
NE8 1HH

Dear Ms Whellans

## 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.

## Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately. The good performance in 2010 has not been sustained because a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in January 2011, although adequate overall, found a number of serious weaknesses with nine requiring immediate attention. The inspection also found that areas for development identified in the May 2010 unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection had not been addressed fully. These findings are not consistent with children's services that perform well and are key factors central to this year's assessment.

In some areas, the quality of inspected provision has improved although the good provision in secondary schools, reported in 2010, has not been maintained. The large majority of primary schools continue to help children and young people learn well.

### Strengths

- For children under five, the large majority of provision in early years and childcare settings is good or outstanding. The children's centre inspected since the last assessment is good. Almost all 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 steadily and match similar areas, although children from low-income families do less well than the average for such groups in similar areas.
- Primary schools are mostly good or outstanding, as they were in 2010. None are inadequate. Results at the age of 11 have improved at a faster rate than nationally and are above similar areas and the national average. Provisional results for 2011 show that these standards have been sustained.
- All special schools, including the two special school sixth forms and the residential special school for young people with complex needs, are good or better.
- All three local authority children's homes are now at least good and the local authority adoption agency has improved from satisfactory to good. As in 2010, the fostering agency remains good.
- Provision for learning post-16 is outstanding at the college, although four of the nine secondary school sixth forms are only satisfactory. There has been some success in narrowing the gap between the attainment of the majority of 19-year-olds in Gateshead and those from low-income families. In 2010, level 2 results for young people from a low-income background

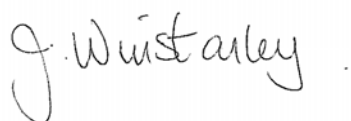
improved significantly and were well above the average performance for similar groups elsewhere.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- There are serious weaknesses in services to safeguard some children. The January 2011 inspection of safeguarding judged leadership and management, performance management and quality assurance as inadequate. The local authority has not focussed enough on the quality of management oversight across children's social care services. This concern had already been identified as part of a local serious case review and in the December 2010 inspection of the youth offending service. A development and action plan, dated March 2011, was promptly developed and shows that appropriate actions are being taken to address the issues identified. The full impact of these developments on current practice has yet to be demonstrated through inspection.
- Outcomes for looked after children and young people and for care leavers are only satisfactory. Some services to promote their well-being are underdeveloped. For example, there is insufficient opportunity for young people to feedback about the quality of the services they use and need. The independent adoption agency is only satisfactory.
- Some education provision is only satisfactory. This includes the pupil referral unit and three of the 10 local authority secondary schools. One secondary school is now in an Ofsted category of concern. As reported in 2010, persistent absence from school remains a key area for development and the local authority is undertaking a review of behaviour support. While results for 16-year-olds are improving and match similar areas, the gap in attainment between the majority of 16-year-olds in Gateshead and young people from a low-income background and those with special educational needs is wider than in similar areas. This was an issue in 2010.

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