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8 November 2011

Mr David Williams  
Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services  
Durham County Council  
Children and Young People's Services Department  
County Hall  
Durham  
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Dear Mr Williams

## 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.

## Durham County Council children's services assessment 2011

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Durham County Council perform well. This year's higher grade recognises the improvements made in the overall quality of some settings with very little being inadequate. The very large majority of inspected services, settings and institutions help children and young people stay safe and learn well. The inspection judgements of schools that are now 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 March 2011 found that all the areas for development identified in 2010 had been addressed. There are no areas for priority action and few areas for development.

### Strengths

- Very young children make good progress in their development and, over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved faster than nationally. As last year, the very large majority of nursery provision is good or outstanding. Most of the children's centres inspected are good.
- The good quality of primary schools has been maintained and the large majority are good or outstanding. Results for 11-year-olds have improved year on year. They are slightly above the national average and match the average in similar areas. Provisional Key Stage 2 results for 2011 show that standards have been maintained.
- The majority of secondary schools, including academies, are good or better and none are now inadequate. This is an improvement on 2010. However, as reported in last year's assessment, a minority of local authority schools, including over half of the sixth forms, are only satisfactory. The 2011 provisional results for 16-year-olds show that GCSE results at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics have improved significantly in some schools and in the county overall. Over the past four years, results have improved at a faster rate than nationally.
- The local authority provides good support for the very small number of schools that are, or have been, in Ofsted categories of concern. Monitoring visits show that support to bring about improvement is effective.
- Specialist education provision, including the local authority special schools, the special school sixth forms, the independent special school and the pupil referral unit are of good quality overall as they were last year.

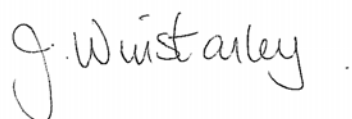
- Three of the four colleges providing post-16 learning are good and one is outstanding as reported in last year's assessment. The proportion of young people achieving level 2 or level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 matches similar areas.
- For looked after children, adoption and fostering services, including those that are privately run, are mostly outstanding. The large majority of the local authority children's homes are also good or better and this is an improvement on last year.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Half of the childminding provision is only satisfactory as reported in 2010.
- Although improving, levels of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage for very young children from low-income families are below the average for such children in similar areas. The gap between them and the majority of children in the same age group in Durham is not closing. This is also the case for older young people. As overall results improve, the attainment gap between the majority of 16- and 19-year-olds and young people from a low-income background is slow to close.

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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment