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Ms Helen Denton
Executive Director for Children and Young People
Lancashire County Council
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Dear Ms Denton

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.

Lancashire County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's Services in Lancashire County Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and all provision effectively help children and young people to learn and stay safe. During the academic year five outstanding secondary schools converted to academy status and these judgements have been taken into account in the 2011 assessment. Main strengths and areas for development remain similar to last year with some improvement in the overall effectiveness of early years and childcare provision and secondary school performance.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found one area of strength, a range of practice that meets statutory guidance requirements, and six areas for development. There are no priority actions requiring urgent attention. Concerns identified in the 2009 inspection have been addressed with the exception of the timely completion of initial assessments.

Strengths

- The majority of children aged 5 years old achieve a good level of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage in line with similar areas and the national average. The large majority of registered day care provision is good. All children's centres that have been inspected for the first time in this academic year are good or outstanding.
- The large majority of nursery and primary schools continue to be good or better. Of those schools which were inadequate during the year, six have recently come out of an Ofsted category of concern and are now at least satisfactory. The three schools remaining in an Ofsted category of concern are receiving good support from the local authority to make necessary improvements.
- The overall effectiveness of secondary schools has improved slightly this year. Four of the seven general further education colleges and the sixth form college are outstanding. Six secondary sixth forms are good, one is outstanding and five are satisfactory.
- Steady and sustained improvement is demonstrated in the achievement of 16-year-olds gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics; this includes children from low-income families and the gap in achievement between this group and all other pupils in Lancashire is reducing slowly. This year, the proportion of young people with special educational needs achieving five good GCSE qualifications increased but the gap in achievement between this group and others of the same age, which had reduced last year, has widened and is now in

line with similar areas and the national average. Young people aged 16 of mixed ethnic backgrounds, do better than their peers in Lancashire and in similar areas and nationally. Increasing numbers of young people aged between 16 and 19 years old are gaining qualifications at level 2 and level 3. This is above performance in similar areas.

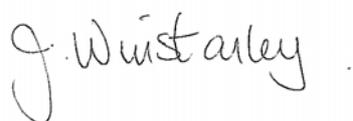
- The large majority of special schools and pupil referral units are good or outstanding and this performance has been sustained since 2010.
- Both local authority agencies for adoption and fostering are good as are the large majority of local authority children's homes and all other provisions commissioned by the local authority for looked after children. No provision is inadequate.

Areas for further improvement

- Many aspects of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection are satisfactory. However, a number of areas require attention. These include the uneven distribution of experienced and newly qualified staff within social work teams and the under-developed use of the common assessment framework across the partnership. However, focused action is being taken by the local authority and plans are in place to address immediate deficiencies.
- Fewer young children from low-income families achieve good levels of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage than in similar areas and nationally, and the gap in achievement between this group and their peers in Lancashire has widened. Provisional results for 2011 show standards in national tests for 11-year-olds have declined by one percentage point since 2010, when performance was in line with similar areas and nationally.
- Too much satisfactory provision is found in approximately one third of early years and childcare settings, secondary schools and post-16 education settings. Two maintained secondary schools and one maintained special school are inadequate, and satisfactory progress is being made to address identified weaknesses. A further special school not maintained by the local authority is inadequate.

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 blue ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment