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Mr David Lund
Executive Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mr Lund

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes 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 data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against 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 2009, 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.

Blackpool Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Blackpool Borough Council continue to perform well.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The three special schools, two secondary special school sixth forms, the sixth form college and one of the further education colleges are outstanding. Much of the childcare provision is good, as are most of the primary schools, the pupil referral unit, the secondary sixth form school and the second further education college. Secondary schools, however, do not do as well, inspections showing that one of the eight secondary schools is good, six are satisfactory and one is now inadequate; no secondary schools are outstanding. This shows a slight decline in performance from last year. The very little inadequate provision overall includes one primary school. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good and the three children's homes are good or outstanding. The very large majority of provision inspected help children stay safe and achieve well at school.

A full inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children in December 2009, reported that services for safeguarding were adequate and looked after children services were good. Private fostering arrangements are satisfactory.

National performance measures show most outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas and the large majority of education attainment and progress indicators are inline with comparators. Children at the Early Years Foundation Stage do not do as well as those in similar areas but they soon catch up and make very good progress through their primary school years, and better than their peers elsewhere. Sixteen-year-olds do less well in national tests and results are well below all areas. Latest validated data show there has been marked improvement in the last year, although results are still below average. Young people with special educational needs do less well at ages 11 and 16 than their peers elsewhere. Persistent absence rates continue to be high in secondary schools. The proportion of 19-year-olds achieving good GCSE, A level or equivalent qualifications is improving year on year and is now in line with their peers in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve the attainment of children in their early years and young people at age 16 years.
- Improve the achievement of children and young people who have special educational needs.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. Nearly all schools and children's homes are good at this, although secondary schools and the pupil referral unit do not do as well. Take-up of school lunches in secondary schools continues to be high and better than in similar areas, and levels of obesity have not risen significantly since last year. However, fewer children take part in physical education and sport than elsewhere and breast-feeding rates are also very low in comparison to other parts of the country. In its Children and Young People's Plan the local authority has prioritised improving young people's awareness and understanding of sexual relationships and the consequences of early teenage pregnancy. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant remains high; progress to reduce the rate, however, has been slow but numbers are falling.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in nearly all settings. Effective action is taken by local services to make sure children are protected from risk of harm and feel safe. Local data for children in need confirm this although core assessments continue to take longer to complete than elsewhere. A common system for planning early responses to those children and families needing help is used widely by all agencies and parents value the quality of support they receive. Safeguarding arrangements in children's homes are consistently good and the large majority of children and young people in care said they felt very safe in the recent safeguarding inspection survey. Fewer children than last year have been killed or seriously injured on the roads and a recent local survey found that fewer young people feel bullied than elsewhere. Hospital admissions caused by unintentional or deliberate injuries, however, have increased slightly since last year and numbers are higher than the national average.

Almost all services and settings are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning but this is less so in secondary schools. Provision in the pupil referral unit has improved and is now good, primary schools are almost always good and special schools are outstanding. Achievement in personal, social and language development for five-year-olds is low in comparison to similar areas but good progress is made in primary school; by the age of 11 most children reach the appropriate level of attainment. However, unvalidated data for 2010 show a slight decline in performance in national tests for children of this age. Too few secondary schools are helping children to reach high enough standards and at 16 years old young people do not do as well in getting good examination results as their peers in similar areas or nationally. The most recent published results, however, show a marked improvement. Children and young people with special educational needs do not do as well as similar groups nationally. Behaviour in secondary schools is satisfactory but the number of pupils who are often absent from school is much higher than similar areas. This is a key priority for the local authority and some progress is being made to turn this around.

The voice of Blackpool's children is central to the Children and Young People's Plan where their concerns and priorities are clearly expressed. Their participation in decision making has been recognised nationally as best practice. Successful events are held regularly involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services and most settings are very good at encouraging young people to be active within their communities. An inspection in 2009 found that re-offending rates of young people were reducing comparably with similar areas and that by most performance measures the youth offending service was working reasonably well. Fewer young people who offend are helped in to appropriate work or training than elsewhere.

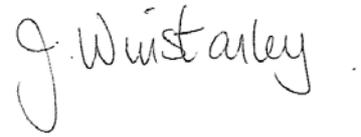
Many parents in Blackpool have little or no personal experience of further or higher education so the local authority is keen to raise aspirations, with some success. For example, take-up of formal childcare by low-income families is much higher than the national average and the numbers of young people not in education, work or training continue to reduce each year. The number of 17-year-olds who continue in education or training is increasing and is in line with similar areas. By the age of 19, young people do as well as their peers in similar areas in achieving good GCSEs and higher level qualifications and those from low-income families also do well, with more going on to higher education than elsewhere. Fewer care leavers are helped in to appropriate work or training than last year, although they all continue to be found suitable accommodation when they leave care.

Prospects for improvement

Children's services in Blackpool performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. The local authority and its partners focus effectively on the needs, issues and concerns expressed by and for children and young people and almost all outcomes are improving. Good progress has been made in a number of important areas. The local authority also knows where the weaknesses lie and has plans to try to put them right. For example, it is working hard to improve outcomes in secondary schools where the most recent inspection reports show that standards and attendance are slowly getting better but there is still much more to do to ensure progress is sustained over time. Achievement of children across the Early Years Foundation Stage also remains lower than in similar areas and requires improvement. Progress has been made in ensuring young people continue to learn when they leave school at 16 years old; higher numbers of 17-year-olds now go on to training programmes and increasingly, young people are achieving good qualifications by the time they reach 19 years old. The inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services judged services for safeguarding to be adequate with adequate capacity to improve and services for looked after children to be good. Partnership arrangements are particularly effective and both services provide good value for money.

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 large initial 'J' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment