

8 November 2011

Ms Margaret Goldie
Corporate Director for Children and Young People
West Berkshire Council
Avonbank House
West Street
Newbury
Berkshire RG14 1BZ

Dear Ms Goldie

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.

West Berkshire Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in West Berkshire Council perform well. The local authority's track record of good performance has been sustained in 2011. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and provision helps children and young people learn well and stay safe. A number of schools have now become academies in the last year and their most recent inspection grades as local authority schools have been taken into account in making this assessment.

In December 2010, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified areas that met requirements, as well as three strengths and a number of areas for development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. The priority action identified at the previous inspection, in January 2010, has been addressed, but one important area for development concerning the allocation of complex work to family support workers is still not fully resolved.

Strengths

- The large majority of childminding and childcare provision is good or better and the proportion of good and outstanding providers has increased in the last year.
- Strong features of contract, referral and assessment arrangements include the local authority's well established early intervention services for children in need and children who may be in need of protection.
- For children under five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good or better. Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage are in line with similar areas and the national average. There has been a consistent trend of improvement over the last four years which is better than the national picture.
- The number of primary schools that are good or better has increased in the last year, building on the large majority of schools that were good or better in 2010.
- Seven of the 10 secondary schools are now good or better and the other three are now satisfactory. Improvement in this provision was an area for development last year. Key Stage 4 attainment at the age of 16 is in line with similar areas and the national average and improved well in 2010.
- All special schools and pupil referral units remain good or better and this performance is better than in similar areas and that found nationally.

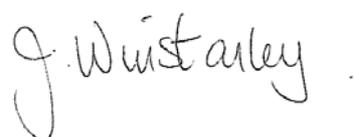
- The adoption service improved from good to outstanding this year and the fostering service remains outstanding. The local authority children's home is good, as is the very large majority of provision it commissions for looked after children and young people placed outside the local authority area. All the independent fostering and adoption agencies used by the local authority are good or better.
- The inspection of the youth offending service identified good performance in safeguarding, reducing risk of harm and preventing re-offending. The service has promising prospects for improvement.

Areas for further improvement

- The most recent inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified a number of key areas for development. These include the allocation of inappropriately complex work to family support workers, which was also a concern from the previous inspection, and the need to improve the supervision of inexperienced staff.
- While all post-16 education provision is now satisfactory or better, it remains mixed overall. The two school sixth forms inspected this year have made good improvements. The general further education college and the majority of school sixth forms are now good, but four of the 10 sixth forms remain only satisfactory. Achievement at level 2 and level 3 at the age of 19 is in line with the average for similar areas and nationally, but improvements over the last four years have been slower than elsewhere.
- The local authority has had mixed success in closing attainment gaps between the small numbers of children and young people from low-income families and the majority in West Berkshire. While the attainment gap at level 2 qualifications has closed over the four years to 2010, the gap at the age of five has widened and the gaps at GCSE and A level are the same now as they were in 2005/06, with some fluctuations in between.
- While attainment at Key Stage 2 remains in line with similar areas and the national average, results have not improved since 2008.

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