

9 December 2010

Mr Matt Dunkley  
Director of Children's Services  
East Sussex County Council  
PO Box 4, County Hall  
St Anne's Crescent, Lewes  
East Sussex, BN7 1SG

Dear Mr Dunkley

## 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.

## East Sussex County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
---------------------------------------	--------------------------

Children's services in East Sussex County Council continue to perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and there is little inadequate provision. Childcare and childminder settings are mostly good, as are nurseries and early years education in primary schools. The overall effectiveness of primary and secondary schools has improved since the 2009 assessment but remains satisfactory. After the age of 16, just over half of the provision is good or better. Half of secondary school sixth forms are good or better, as are two of the three general further education colleges, and the sixth form college is satisfactory. The quality of local authority special schools has declined with only four out of ten now good or better and one inadequate. Despite the decline, all but one special school sixth forms are good or better. One pupil referral unit is good and one satisfactory. Fostering and adoption agencies managed by the authority as well as those run by private or voluntary organisations are good or better, as are most children's homes.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services conducted in 2009 found a number of strengths and areas for development but no areas requiring priority action.

National measures of performance show most outcomes to be broadly in line with comparators or better. Results in national tests for 11- and 16-year-olds are just below the averages for similar areas and improving rapidly at the age of 16. Far fewer 19-year-olds than in similar parts of the country achieve higher level qualifications although numbers are improving steadily. Standards achieved by children from families with low incomes are mostly lower than elsewhere, although improving at the ages of 11 and 16 and for lower level qualifications by the age of 19. Children and young people with special educational needs achieve results which are the same as for similar parts of the country and are beginning to catch up with their peers at the age of 11 but not 16. Numbers of young people who are not in education, work or training have reduced but remain higher than in similar areas.

### Key areas for further improvement

- Improve the overall effectiveness of special schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve the overall effectiveness of provision after the age of 16 and increase the numbers of young people achieving higher level qualifications by the age of 19.
- Continue to improve standards for children and young people from families with low incomes.

## Outcomes for children and young people

Inspected services are consistently good or better at helping children and young people adopt healthy lifestyles. Most outcomes are improving although not consistently across all parts of the county. Breast-feeding rates have improved and are now good. High and improving numbers of children take part in physical activities or sport and far fewer than average are too overweight at the age of 11. Numbers of teenagers who get pregnant are very variable across the county and are not reducing quickly enough. Misuse of drugs and alcohol is broadly average and the council is rightly targeting resources to areas of particular concern. The access children and young people have to emotional or mental health services is much improved. Services have been particularly diligent in identifying concerns and providing support for children in care.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good or better across inspected services and settings. The 2009 unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found no significant concerns, although social workers were found at times to have heavy workloads. Fewer initial assessments of children and young people's needs are now completed on time however, and similarly so full assessments when they are required. There has also been an increase since 2009 in children requiring more than one child protection plan. The effectiveness of arrangements for keeping children and young people safe within their communities are mixed. Children killed or injured in road traffic accidents have increased in two areas of the county and hospital admissions due to unintended or deliberate injuries are consistently higher than in similar parts of the country. Work to reduce bullying is increasingly effective and children report feeling safer at school and in their communities.

Services and settings inspected by Ofsted are mostly good at helping children and young people learn. The standards children and young people achieve in national tests and examinations are just below the average for similar areas and whilst there has been no change for three years for 11-year-olds, they are improving well at age 16. Actions taken by the authority to help schools improve have been effective in reducing the number of secondary schools failing to achieve the minimum standards of pupil performance. Children from families with low incomes do not do as well as elsewhere, although standards are improving, particularly at the age of 16. Results for children and young people with special educational needs are the same as for similar parts of the country. They are beginning to catch up with their peers at the age of 11 but the gap is widening at age 16. Behaviour in secondary schools is broadly average. The number of young people who are often absent is high but reducing.

Schools, colleges and services are consistently good in helping children and young people contribute to the community and in involving them in decisions which affect their lives, although the pupil referral units need to do more in this respect. Many young people are involved in organised after school activities and opportunities for them to do so are increasing. Young people breaking the law for the first time have reduced but more are re-offending. Fewer of those who have offended than average

work or continue in education or training and fewer but increasing numbers have suitable places to live.

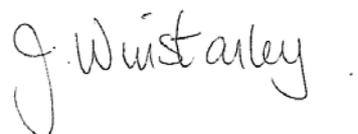
Most services and settings help children and young people prepare for working life well, although school sixth forms, the sixth form and independent specialist colleges, and one of the pupil referral units need to do more. Numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not working, continuing with their education or being trained remain much higher than in similar parts of the country. Young people are increasingly better qualified by the age of 19 but fewer than in similar areas gain higher level qualifications. Standards achieved by young people from families with low incomes by the age of 19 are also improving but while they are catching up with their peers for lower level qualifications they are not at the higher level. The authority continues to be successful in helping most young people leaving care to progress to work, education or training and in finding them suitable places to live.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Most outcomes for children and young people are improving, although not consistently across the county. Higher levels of teenage pregnancy, youth offending and drug and alcohol misuse, for example, are centred on particular localities. The authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan shows that it knows the county well and is clear about what needs to be done to improve outcomes further. The authority recognises that there is more to be done to reduce inequalities between different groups of children and young people. Good work continues to ensure children, young people, and families contribute to reviewing the effectiveness of services. Partnership working is well-established, with clear procedures for targeting resources to areas of greatest need and to supporting children and families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Although the youth offending service performs poorly against national indicators, service delivery in a number of key outcome areas is good with good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found effective procedures for sharing information concerning the safety of children and young people between agencies. At times however, social workers were found to have heavy work loads and, although no examples were seen of children being left at risk, the start of services needed by children and families could be delayed. The authority supports schools well to help them improve and unvalidated results for 2009/10 indicate standards for 11-year-olds have improved.

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