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Mrs Sue Imbriano
Director of Children's Services
Buckinghamshire County Council
Room 20E, County Hall
Walton Street
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Dear Mrs Imbriano

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.

Buckinghamshire County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Buckinghamshire County Council perform excellently. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding, and few are inadequate. Almost all are good at helping young people to learn and stay safe. Educational attainment is mostly above the national average for five-, 11-, 16- and 19-year-olds and continues to improve steadily. Areas of strength remain largely the same as last year and progress has been made in the key areas for further development. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and more schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

Ofsted's recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified a number of strengths and three areas for development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. A full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in 2010 judged the overall effectiveness of both as good. Inspection also shows excellent safeguarding arrangements in youth offending work.

Strengths

- As last year, the large majority of provision for early years and childcare is good or better, with registered day care showing further improvement. Four children's centres are judged good but two are only satisfactory.
- Most provision for early years education in nursery and primary schools is judged good or better and almost a quarter is now outstanding, but since last year one infant school is inadequate and requires significant improvement. Achievement at the age five is average and improving. For children from low-income families, achievement is below similar areas and nationally although the gap has closed well.
- Primary schools are mostly good and a quarter are outstanding. Of the three that were inadequate in 2010, two are now satisfactory and the third is making satisfactory progress. Eleven-year-olds make at least average progress from the age of seven and reach above average standards that have remained static for four years. Provisional results for 2011 show improvement above national figures.
- The large majority of secondary schools are good or better and 10 that are judged good or outstanding have become academies. Most of the secondary schools inspected since last year show improvement but two are inadequate. Ofsted's monitoring visits to one secondary school show inadequate progress despite strong support from the local authority. Most

secondary schools have good or outstanding standards of behaviour and the poor attendance of some young people is reducing steadily. The proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is above average and shows steady improvement. Attainment for minority ethnic groups is at least average.

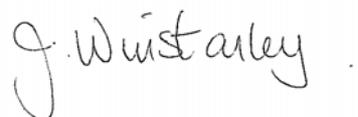
- After the age of 16, average numbers of young people are in education, employment or training, as are the above average number of care leavers. A survey carried out by Ofsted shows well-established commissioning arrangements contribute very effectively in this area. The number of 19-year-olds achieving higher level and other qualifications are above average and steadily increasing. Above average numbers of young people from low-income families gain qualifications at level 3 and average numbers gain level 2 qualifications. For both groups, the gap with their peers has closed well.
- Most specialist provision in special schools and pupil referral units remains good or outstanding and better than elsewhere.
- For looked after children, all services for fostering and adoption remain good or outstanding, as are the two children's homes run by the local authority and the three children's homes that are independently run. The very large majority of children's homes that are commissioned by the local authority are good or better.

Areas for further improvement

- Although the attainment of 16-year-olds from low-income families is average, the gap with their peers remains much bigger than nationally and shows little sign of closing in the last four years. At the same age, young people with special educational needs show above average attainment but the gap with their peers has widened gradually over the same period.
- As last year, provision for learning after the age of 16 remains a relative weakness. Although the majority of school sixth forms are good or better overall, performance is below that found elsewhere. Both further education colleges are now judged satisfactory, one having been good.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment