

9 December 2010

Ms Meera Spillett  
Director for Children, Young People and Families  
Oxfordshire County Council  
County Hall, New Road  
Oxford, Oxfordshire  
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Dear Ms Spillett

## 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.

## Oxfordshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Oxfordshire County Council continue to perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding and few are inadequate. All do well at supporting learning and achievement and most in keeping children and young people safe. For young children, childminders and childcare are mostly good although one-third remains only satisfactory. Most nursery and primary schools are good but one-third of the latter are only satisfactory, three are inadequate and two need improving. The majority of secondary schools are good but one-third is again only satisfactory and one is now inadequate. Provision for learning after the age of 16 is mostly good as is the pupil referral unit. Special school provision is mostly good or outstanding but one run by the local authority has recently been judged inadequate. For children in care, arrangements for fostering and adoption are at least good. Children's homes are weaker than elsewhere; one of two managed by the local authority is now only satisfactory, having been judged good for many years, as are half of the eight homes run by independent providers.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a number of significant strengths and an area in need of priority action that was being addressed well. Two years ago, the joint area review judged safeguarding as adequate. Private fostering arrangements are satisfactory.

National measures of performance show the very large majority of outcomes are at least in line with those for similar areas or nationally, but only the large majority of measures for educational attainment and progress. Standards are improving, including for children and young people from low-income families and for those with special educational needs, but too slowly, although the latter group tend to have complex needs. The achievement of five-year-olds is broadly average, as are test results for 11-year-olds. For 16-year-olds, standards are still below similar areas and 19-year-olds have fewer qualifications than in similar areas. Attainment gaps for key vulnerable groups are bigger than in similar local authorities and nationally, and most are not closing fast enough. The gap is getting bigger for 16-year-olds from low-income families and for those with special educational needs. Too many young women under the age of 18 still become pregnant.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve childminders and childcare, primary and secondary schools and children's homes so that more are good or better.
- Accelerate the rate of improvement in standards for 16-year-olds and qualifications at the age of 19 and close attainment gaps.

- Reduce the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant.

## **Outcomes for children and young people**

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are generally very successful but the pupil referral unit does not do as well.

Improvements include more mothers who breast-feed, partly due to a new community infant feeding service, and many more children are satisfied with parks and play areas. However, some children in care identify emotional and behavioural difficulties. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant has not reduced fast enough, and a survey by Ofsted found youth support services were not involved well enough in teenage pregnancy work. The local authority is clear about areas of the county with the highest rates and a new strategy and action plan is in place.

Action for keeping children and young people safe in services and settings is almost always very successful. Within the community, fewer children are now killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents, but more children than nationally run away from home or care. In front-line child protection services, referrals are dealt with promptly despite an increase when thresholds were made clearer. The percentage of initial assessments carried out on time has fallen because some cases have drifted and fewer full assessments are completed on time. Some plans to protect children at risk of harm last for longer than they should but more children now need more than one plan. All child protection plans are reviewed on time. Families are found very quickly for children who need to be adopted. Children in care have an average number of placement moves and they now stay in them for longer. Most meetings to review their plans are held on time.

Inspected services and settings are very successful in helping children and young people to learn and achieve, and all statements of special educational needs are completed on time. Achievement for five-year-olds has improved slightly faster than in similar local authorities and the gap for those not doing as well has closed more quickly. Pupils make average progress in primary schools but all schools did not do as well as expected in 2009 tests, so local targets were missed. The attainment gap for pupils with special educational needs has got slightly bigger, and for children from low-income families it has closed more than in similar local authorities, but not as much as nationally. In secondary schools, results for 16-year-olds have improved gradually, but only at the same rate as similar local authorities, so they remain below average and a key local target was missed for the fourth year running. Unvalidated data for 2010 show all local authority schools, and academies, reaching the minimum educational standards for pupil performance. The gap for young people from low-income families has got bigger as has that for those with special educational needs. Well targeted action is underway to improve this situation, backed by strong commitment from elected members. More secondary schools now have good or

outstanding standards of behaviour and the 'Success Project' is tackling the poor attendance of some pupils and successfully reducing exclusions.

Inspected services and settings strongly support children and young people to be active in their communities and England's Deputy Children's Commissioner has considered their views on this issue. The pupil referral unit and children's homes however are weaker. An Ofsted survey found satisfactory arrangements for youth support was having a good impact on learning and development, together with good involvement of young people in shaping decisions in schools. Vulnerable young people involved in or at risk of crime and anti-social behaviour are identified early. Very good partnerships with the police, good use of data and better sharing of information, result in far fewer young people now breaking the law for the first time, although more now re-offend and more are sentenced to custody. More young offenders are now in education, work or training and an average number have a suitable place to live.

The large majority of inspected services are successful in helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being although primary schools are only satisfactory. Average numbers remain in education or training at the age of 17 but more are not in education, training or work by the age of 18 than in similar local authorities. More young people are gaining qualifications at the age of 19, although still not as many as in similar areas, and partners are now looking at how young people's skills match what employers want. For higher level qualifications, the gap for those from low-income families is not closing although more of these young people now go on to higher education. More care leavers are now in education, work or training and almost all are in suitable accommodation. More families with a low income use the funding for childcare that they are entitled to.

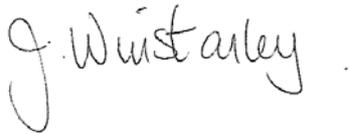
### **Prospects for improvement**

Outcomes continue to improve. Services and settings generally support children and young people well but too much provision for learning is only satisfactory. Key local targets for the attainment of 16-year-olds have again not been met and the target for reducing the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant was also missed. The local authority is now very clear about its priorities, particularly to raise attainment and close gaps for key vulnerable groups. Suitable action is underway and in 2010, provisional data from tests and examinations for 11- and 16-year-olds show the impact of this. New and strong leadership, well-established and successful partnerships, good use of data and very strong monitoring now drive improvement. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show at least satisfactory progress and support from the local authority is making a significant contribution. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found strong management is tackling inconsistencies across teams. Findings from internal audit that identified weaknesses in recording and monitoring of training for safeguarding have been addressed rapidly and well. In 2008, the joint area review judged provision as good for looked after children. The youth offending service has been judged as strongly led and working reasonably well, with excellent capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance. Its work on helping to stop young

people from committing crimes and its partnerships with other services are particularly strong.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment