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Ms Louise Goll
Corporate Director of Children and Young People
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Children and Young People's Directorate
County Hall
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Dear Ms Goll

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.

Somerset County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Somerset County Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. As found elsewhere, changes to school provision, particularly secondary schools, are taking place and some schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in this assessment. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and help children and young people well to learn and stay safe. Areas of strength remain the same as last year and there has been some progress in the areas identified for improvement. For example, more children's homes managed by the local authority are now good or better with none inadequate. However, the proportion of local authority run special schools which are good or better has not improved, but none are now inadequate. There has also been no improvement in the overall effectiveness of secondary schools.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and those who may be in need of protection found some key strengths, mostly satisfactory provision with three areas requiring further development but none requiring priority action.

Strengths

- The quality of early years and childcare settings has improved since the last assessment and the large majority are good or better.
- For children under five, the large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good and some is outstanding. Children's level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved and is in line with the average in similar areas and nationally.
- There has been a small improvement in the overall effectiveness of primary schools which are now mostly good or better. Standards achieved by 11-year-olds in national tests are in line with the national average and have shown the same overall rate of improvement in recent years.
- At Key Stage 4 education standards for 16-year-olds have improved well since the last assessment and are in line with the average for similar areas. After the age of 16, provision for learning is good in two general further education colleges and outstanding in another, as it is in the sixth form college. By the age of 19, young people's educational achievements are improving and are in line with the country overall in the extent to which they gain five good GCSEs or the equivalent or higher level qualifications.
- For children and young people requiring specialist provision, the large majority of pupil referral units and special school sixth forms are good or better and two of the six residential special schools are good with three

outstanding. Education standards for 16-year-olds with special educational needs who follow the national curriculum have improved since the last assessment and are better than the average elsewhere.

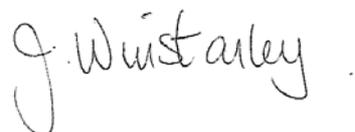
- For looked after children, fostering and adoption services, including those managed by the local authority, are mostly good and the quality of children's homes has improved with the large majority now good or better. Where the local authority commissions services, the very large majority of placements are with good or better fostering or adoption agencies or in good or better children's homes.

Areas for further improvement

- Although the majority of secondary schools are good or better over a third are only satisfactory and there has been a slight decline in the proportion of good or better schools since the last assessment. Almost a half of secondary school sixth forms are also only satisfactory.
- Of the 10 children's centres which have been inspected only three are good or better with one inadequate. The local authority is working with centres to ensure they have appropriate data to target their services and evaluate impact.
- Only three of the eight local authority special schools are good or better although none are now inadequate. This level of good or better provision is much lower than seen in similar parts of the country.
- Despite improvement last year, young people from families with low incomes do not do as well as similar young people nationally in their educational achievements at the ages of 16 and 19. Only with respect to level 2 qualifications at the age of 19 has progress been made in recent years in narrowing the gap between these young people and others in the county.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment