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Ms Clair Pyper
Strategic Director of Education and Children Services
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Dear Ms Pyper

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.

Slough Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Slough Borough Council perform poorly. In 2010, services were performing well. However, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children, in June 2011, judged safeguarding and capacity to improve to be inadequate. Services for looked after children and the capacity to improve in this area are satisfactory.

In other important respects, the strengths and areas for development remain much the same as in 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and the very large majority of provision helps children and young people learn and stay safe. The quality of primary schools remains very uneven. A number of secondary schools have become academies in the last year and almost all of them were judged to be good or better at their last inspection; these inspection findings have been taken into account in making this assessment.

Strengths

- The very large majority of registered day-care provision is good or outstanding. All childminding is now at least satisfactory and more providers are outstanding than in 2010. The children's centre that has been inspected is good.
- For children under five, the large majority of nurseries and Early Years Foundation Stage provision in primary schools remain good or better. The gap in attainment between children from low-income families and the majority of five-year-olds in Slough is closing, however, this group continues to achieve below the average for their counterparts elsewhere.
- The very large majority of secondary schools and post-16 education provision are at least good and half the secondary schools are outstanding. Rates of persistent school absence are consistently below the average for similar areas. Achievement at Key Stage 4 and at level 2 and level 3 by the age of 19 has been above the average for similar areas and found nationally for many years. Provisional 2011 results at Key Stage 4 show that good improvement has been maintained. Over the last four years, rates of improvement for level 2 and level 3 qualifications have also been better than the average elsewhere. Young people from low-income backgrounds at the age of 19 do better than the average for their counterparts nationally.
- As in 2010, the pupil referral unit is outstanding. One of the three special schools is also outstanding, one is good and one is satisfactory.

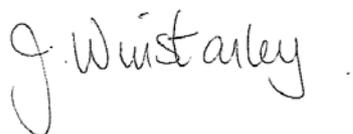
- Looked after children and young people receive good support to live healthy life-styles, get involved in decisions which affect them and prepare for independence. The proportion of care leavers in education, training or work is above the national average. Fostering and adoption services are good. The very large majority of commissioned services are good or better.

Areas for further improvement

- Safeguarding arrangements and capacity to improve are inadequate. There are major weaknesses in leadership and management, performance management and quality assurance. The performance of the youth offending service, including its work in safeguarding, is not as good as that found elsewhere.
- Inspection grades for primary schools deteriorated in 2011. Four schools are currently inadequate and a third of all schools are only satisfactory. Attainment at the age of 11 has improved from a low base to match the average for similar areas, but in 2010 the progress made by children from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 was still below average. Schools in Ofsted categories of concern are making sound progress with good support from the local authority.
- Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage are consistently below similar areas and the national average, albeit that the gap is closing. Provisional results for 2011 show a marked improvement.
- Some areas of provision remain, or have been judged to be, only satisfactory in 2011. These include an academy, one of the school sixth forms, one of the two local authority children's homes and over a third of childminding.

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