

9 December 2010

Mr Martin Pratt  
Corporate Director Children and Learning  
Luton Borough Council  
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Dear Mr Pratt

## 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.

## Luton Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Luton Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, all special schools and pupil referral units perform well as do almost all nursery and secondary schools and much of the childcare provision. More childminders have been judged good over the last year. Post-16 provision in schools is good and both local colleges are outstanding. Inspections show a slight reduction in the proportion of good primary schools and one junior school and an infant school are failing to provide satisfactory quality of education. However, two more schools are now outstanding. A children's home judged inadequate during the year has improved and is now satisfactory. The local adoption agency is good. The local authority's fostering agency and private fostering arrangements are both adequate.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much satisfactory provision with strengths in the arrangements for working with the police to help young people at risk of domestic violence. Weaknesses were identified in the time it was taking to complete initial assessments.

National performance measures show outcomes are almost always in line with, or above the averages for England or similar areas. Results in national tests for 11-year-olds are in line with similar areas. More 16-year-olds do better than their peers in similar areas and the gap with the national average is closing more quickly. Young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families do well at the age of 11, 16 and 19. The difference in how well they do compared to their peers gets smaller each year. Too few 17-year-olds are involved in education, employment or training.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve primary schools so that more are good or better.
- Increase the number of 17-year-olds in education, training or employment.

### Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are usually successful. Children's centres and schools have good approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles. Nearly all schools provide at least the recommended minimum time of high quality physical education each week. Local arrangements focus support and health services where outcomes need to improve. For example, support is given to new mothers breast-feeding their babies as part of local initiatives to reduce high infant death rates. However, more six- and 11-year-olds than

elsewhere are too overweight. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is high and actions to reverse this trend are not reducing the rate as quickly as elsewhere. Positively, fewer 16-year-olds report that they have recently been drunk or taken drugs than in similar areas.

Inspection by Ofsted of schools, colleges and the local adoption agency confirms that arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. However, childminders do not do as well with less than two-thirds judged to be good in this area. Unsatisfactory arrangements for safeguarding in the children's home have been tackled appropriately and provision is now satisfactory. Good local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm. Agencies working in local neighbourhoods provide effective early support to families, reducing the number of children coming into local authority care. Most recent data illustrate an improvement in the number of referrals to children's social care going on to initial assessment. However, the number of both initial and core assessments completed within the recommended timescale has declined. Keeping children safe in their community is highlighted as a priority in Luton's Children and Young People's Plan. Fewer children are admitted to hospital as a result of injury than elsewhere and numbers continue to fall. So too does the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads. The proportion of children who feel they have been bullied is lower than elsewhere. Children and young people with disabilities say they are being bullied more often than their peers and this is identified as a priority for further action.

Nursery, primary and secondary schools and colleges are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Provision to support learning in pupil referral units and special schools is always good and sometimes outstanding. Luton has a high proportion of good or outstanding day care providers; however, too few childminders are good at helping children develop early learning skills. A local survey of children and young people illustrates that they enjoy school. This is confirmed in better than average attendance, good behaviour and improving examination results at the age of 11, 16 and 19. The local authority is successful in identifying children who need support to do well and target their activities to improve outcomes. Those from low-income families and children and young people with special educational needs do better than similar groups nationally. Local authority analysis shows girls do not do as well as boys in mathematics at primary school but do much better than boys by the age of 16. The very low educational achievement of young people in care at the age of 16 is being addressed through an agreed action plan.

Successful arrangements for involving children and young people in their school and community have been in place for some time. Approaches for involving young people in planning and reviewing local services have been recently introduced and a town-wide framework has been developed to provide opportunities for them to contribute to strategic decision-making. A recent survey of young people identified a reduction in the numbers engaging in organised activities in their area. A range of appropriate actions are identified in local plans to increase further the number of young people involved in positive activities. Re-offending by young people in Luton is reducing and

is lower than in similar areas and by most measures, the work of the youth offending service is of a high standard. The number of young people offending for the first time has reduced in recent years.

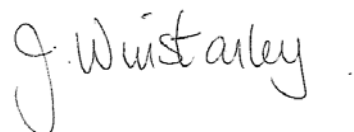
More young people each year are achieving higher level qualifications at the age of 19. Those from low-income families do better than similar groups elsewhere and the difference in their achievement and that of their peers is getting smaller. More vocational courses and placements with vocational providers are being introduced in response to young people's views on reasons for staying in education, employment or training. However, local targets for ensuring young people between 16 and 18 years of age continue to be involved, have not been met. There has been recent good improvement in the numbers of care leavers in education, employment or training.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Almost all outcomes for children and young people are improving in Luton. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates progress in important areas. It is also clear about what still needs to be done and the actions to be taken. Targets for improvement are in place. Good leadership and management and effective partnerships to promote further improvements have been confirmed by Ofsted inspections. The systems for management oversight and supervision in the youth offending service are examples of good practice. Tackling the right priorities and good partnership working are demonstrated through local integrated working arrangements and improvements in educational achievement. Outcomes for groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable are usually good. Where schools are identified with weaknesses, satisfactory support from the local authority is contributing to improvements.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment