

9 December 2009

Ms Anna Wright
Director of Education and Children's Services
Reading Borough Council
Level 10 Civic Centre
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 7AE

Dear Ms Wright

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

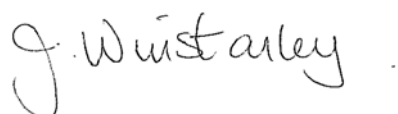
Children's services rating	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Reading Borough Council perform adequately.

The overall effectiveness of the majority of inspected services and settings is good or better, however, performance across early years, education and social care is mixed. Most children get off to a good start. Nursery provision is particularly good and the proportion of good or better childminder settings is better than the average in similar areas and that seen nationally. Childcare is not as good, but satisfactory overall. The performance of the local authority's schools is mixed. Special schools and the pupil referral unit are good. However, too many primary schools, secondary schools and school sixth forms are no better than satisfactory. Provision in primary schools compares poorly with the average in similar areas and that found nationally. The local authority's fostering service is good and the two children's homes are satisfactory. The recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements identified that prompt and effective action has been taken to tackle the significant weaknesses in safeguarding identified in the joint area review in 2008. Good quality assurance processes are now in place, but a number of areas for development remain, including the timeliness of assessments and the quality of children and young people's service plans.

Performance against the large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with or above similar areas and the national figures. Most children and young people enjoy good health and achieve in line with the average for similar areas. The gap in achievement between the majority of children and young people and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable is closing in some areas, but the picture is inconsistent for different groups. For example, a much lower proportion of young people is in learning at age 17 compared to the average for similar areas and that seen nationally, and a low proportion of young people from poorer backgrounds gain qualifications at age 19.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA