

9 December 2009

Mr Paul Burnett
Director for Children and Young People
Northamptonshire County Council
County Hall
George Row
Northampton
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Dear Mr Burnett

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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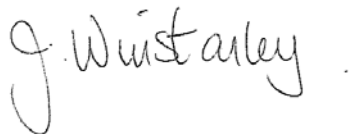
Children's services in Northamptonshire County Council perform adequately.

The performance of the local authority's schools and settings is mixed. A high proportion of childcare and nursery provision is good or better, however, the number of secondary and primary schools performing well is below both similar authorities and national averages. Too many primary and secondary schools are judged as adequate with a small number of each judged inadequate. Less than a half of the local authority's 39 secondary schools are judged good. Provision is variable in school sixth forms and local college provision. Almost all of the local authority's special schools are good with four that are outstanding; all pupil referral units are good overall, although not all are as effective at promoting healthy lifestyles and making a positive contribution. All six of the local authority's children's homes are judged good or better. The inspection judgement of the adoption agency is good. The fostering agency and private fostering arrangements are adequate. The recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need reported strengths in the quality of child-centred work. The areas for development from this inspection identified inconsistency, in the formal recording of management guidance and direction on individual case records.

Performance in national indicators is mixed, with a large majority in line with both similar areas and national figures. However, educational achievement at the ages of 11 and 16 is below average. The difference in the performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age, is reducing slowly and they do not do as well as their peers. Children and young people with special educational needs achieve well and the gap between their achievement and that of their peers is smaller than elsewhere. The local authority does well in some areas of staying safe: there have been recent improvements in reducing the number of moves looked after children experience. However, from previously low figures there has been a recent rise in the proportion of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. There has also been a decline from previously good performance in the number of social care core assessments completed within the expected time scales.

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.

Yours sincerely

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

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA