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Ms Gail Tolley
Director of Children and Young People's Service
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Dear Ms Tolley

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 in, 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 goes not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Milton Keynes Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Milton Keynes Council perform well. This shows sustained improvement from services that were adequate in 2009.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better, including for supporting learning and achievement and in keeping children and young people safe. However, just under half still show performance that is not as strong as in similar areas and nationally and a small number of settings are inadequate. These include three primary schools, one pupil referral unit and one residential special school, the latter due to significant shortfalls in residential provision for the safety and protection of young people. One primary and one secondary school need to improve. For young children, childminders and childcare are mostly good as are nurseries and early years education in primary schools. Primary schools are mostly good but too many are still satisfactory. Secondary schools show marked improvement and now perform better than in similar areas and nationally. Provision after the age of 16 is mostly good or outstanding in school and special school sixth forms, and satisfactory for further education where monitoring visits show strong improvement. Most special schools are good, as are the other two pupil referral units. For children in care, arrangements for adoption and fostering are good or outstanding and most children's homes are good.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found considerable strengths and no areas in need of priority action. Arrangements for private fostering are satisfactory.

National measures of performance show the large majority in line with those for similar areas or nationally but with a key weakness in educational attainment. Standards that are average for five-year-olds and below average at ages 11 and 16, are rising faster than in similar areas. However, apart from 11-year-olds, gaps in attainment for key vulnerable groups are not closing consistently and the gap for 16-year-olds with special educational needs has got bigger. More young people are gaining qualifications at age 19, but they are still not as well qualified as in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve primary schools, special schools and pupil referral units so that more are good or better.
- Raise standards further for 11- and 16-year-olds and improve qualifications for young people at age 19.
- Continue to close attainment gaps, in particular for 16-year-olds with special educational needs.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives show improvement and the contribution of all services and settings is at least good. A full range of services are now in place for children and young people with emotional or mental health difficulties. More babies are breast-fed and fewer five- and 11-year-olds are now too overweight. High and increased numbers of children and young people take part in sport regularly and average numbers are satisfied with parks and play areas. Children and young people in care are satisfied with their placements, and parents of children with disabilities are satisfied with services overall. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is reducing more quickly than nationally helped by good work with partners.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good or outstanding. Within the community, far fewer children are killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents and far fewer are admitted to hospital because they are accidentally or deliberately injured. In front-line child protection services, good training for staff and quick action helps to protect children at risk of harm. Services are good at preventing the need for social workers to carry out assessments. High numbers of initial and full assessments are carried out on time but some do not contain enough analysis. Families are found quickly for children who need to be adopted. Children in care now stay in the same placement for longer and almost all meetings to review their plans are held on time.

With the exception of pupil referral units, services and settings are good or better at supporting learning and achievement, but special educational needs assessments that involve partners are not completed fast enough. Although outcomes are improving, only a minority of national measures for attainment and progress are where they should be and some important ones remain of concern. The achievement of five-year-olds is improving faster than in similar areas and the gap for those not doing as well is closing quickly. More primary schools now reach the minimum standards for pupil performance but test results for 11-year-olds, although improving, remain below those in similar areas because pupils do not yet make enough progress. Examination results for 16-year-olds improved significantly in 2009 and more than in similar areas due in part to more schools reaching minimum standards, but the attainment gap for those with special educational needs is getting bigger. More secondary schools have good or outstanding standards of behaviour and fewer pupils have poor attendance. However, far fewer young people than elsewhere take learning diplomas. Despite determined action by the authority, a recent survey by Ofsted showed some reservations in schools about their use.

Almost all services and settings contribute strongly to help children and young people make a positive contribution to their communities, although pupil referral units and the authority's adoption agency are weaker. Feedback from children and families is used well to improve children's social care services. There are fewer young people than in similar areas reported taking drugs or drinking. By most measures, the youth offending team works reasonably well. Numbers of young people caught breaking the law for the first time have fallen due to successful work with partners and repeat

offending has reduced significantly, but more young people are sentenced to custody. More young people who offend now have a suitable place to live but fewer are in education, training or work.

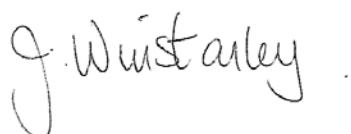
Services and settings mostly provide well for achieving economic well-being but residential special schools and the children's home run by the private and voluntary sector are weaker. Milton Keynes has a high level of unemployment. Currently the skills of many young people do not meet the needs of businesses, although more 17-year-olds are now in education or training and more are getting apprenticeships with local employers. More young people are gaining lower and higher level qualifications at age 19, but they are still not as well qualified as their peers in similar areas. At higher levels, the gap for those from low-income families has recently closed more quickly than elsewhere. More care leavers are in education, employment or work and almost all are in suitable accommodation. More families with a low income now use the funding for childcare to which they are entitled.

Prospects for improvement

In June 2009, Milton Keynes was directed by Government to improve the performance of its children's services. The authority has made good progress and outcomes are improving well. However, educational standards, although getting better, are not yet good enough and remain a key priority in the Children and Young People's Plan. Closing the attainment gap for 16-year-olds with special educational needs is a particular weakness. The plan itself shows strong leadership of children's services, successful partnerships, good use of data and a very thorough review of progress towards targets. Action is directed well to where it is most needed such as in weaker schools, and provisional data for primary schools in 2010 reflect this good work. Ofsted's monitoring visits to inadequate primary schools and the pupil referral unit also report the positive impact of the authority in helping them to improve. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found good partnerships. The youth offending service has good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance.

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 style with a large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment