

9 December 2009

Ms Gail Tolley
Director of Children and Young People's Service
Milton Keynes Council
Saxon Court
502 Avebury Boulevard
Milton Keynes
Buckinghamshire
MK9 3HS

Dear Ms Tolley

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 Milton Keynes Council perform adequately.

The overall effectiveness of the large majority of inspected services and settings is good or better. This shows improvement from 2008 when performance was inadequate.

Further improving achievement remains a key challenge. Although improving, achievement of a level 2 qualification is well below similar areas and the national average. At level 3, achievement has improved to the national average but remains below similar areas. In both primary and secondary schools, minority ethnic groups show average and improving attainment against similar authorities and that seen nationally. For primary schools, performance is below similar areas and performance nationally. An average proportion of secondary schools are good or better, but one third is only satisfactory and one requires special measures; as such performance falls below similar areas and that found nationally. Three secondary schools fall short of national floor targets. The proportion of school sixth forms that are good or better is greater than in similar areas and seen nationally, despite a minority with satisfactory or inadequate provision. The general further education and tertiary provider is only satisfactory, showing performance below similar areas and the national picture.

Provision for children and others whose circumstances make them vulnerable is also below similar areas and provision nationally. Four special schools are good or better, but two are only satisfactory. Two pupil referral units are at least good but one is satisfactory. The three residential special schools are satisfactory, showing performance below similar areas and that seen nationally, partly because of only adequate provision for staying safe.

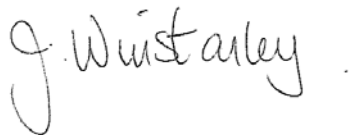
Young children get off to a good start. Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved in line with similar areas and improvement nationally. Most nurseries are good or better, as are the large majority of childcare settings and childminders. Provision for looked after children is mixed. Three of the four children's homes are good or better and the third is satisfactory, showing performance above that found nationally but below similar areas. Fostering and adoption agencies are good but private fostering arrangements are satisfactory, partly because of only adequate provision for staying safe.

Length of placements for looked after children show significant improvement and numbers of care leavers in employment, education or training have increased.

Performance against the large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is at least in line with similar areas and broadly in line with or better than the national figure, although there are weaknesses in four of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. The difference in the performance of children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age is consistently in line with the national figure and similar areas. Gaps are closing as achievement improves.

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 "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA