

9 December 2009

Mr Matt Dunkley
Director of Children's Services
East Sussex County Council
PO Box 4, County Hall
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Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1SG

Dear Mr Dunkley

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

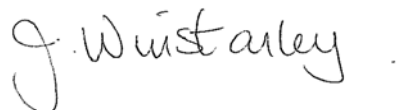
Children's services rating	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in East Sussex County Council perform well.

A higher than average proportion of nurseries are good or outstanding by national and similar area standards and more childcare settings were judged good or better in recent inspections. The overall effectiveness of provision offered by childminders, however, is only satisfactory overall. Although most primary and secondary schools are good or better, a higher proportion than average of both types is satisfactory by national or similar area standards. Provision for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is mostly good. The joint area review conducted in October 2007 judged safeguarding arrangements, provision for looked after children and services for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be good. An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2009, found no significant concerns, although there were some delays in the writing of children and young people's assessments due to limited social worker capacity. Two serious case reviews have been completed and both were judged to be inadequate. Inspected services and settings are consistently better than average nationally or in similar areas, in their actions to keep children and young people safe. All except one of the local authority's children's homes are good or better and both local authority fostering agencies are outstanding. The adoption agency is good and private fostering arrangements are satisfactory. Fewer than average special schools are good or better as is the case with pupil referral units, although none are inadequate.

Performance against a very large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is in line with similar areas and national figures. Initial assessments are carried out on high proportions of referrals to social care services and are completed promptly, although there has been a recent decline. Foster care arrangements are completed well by the local authority, minimising disruption for children and young people who are looked after. The difference in achievement between children and young people from low income families and other families is at the same level as seen nationally or in similar areas. Achievement at age 16 is below that of similar areas, although by age 19 similar proportions achieve level 2 or 3 qualifications as is the case nationally or in similar areas.

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