

9 December 2010

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Dear Dr Karklins

## 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, 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 does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Bracknell Forest Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Bracknell Forest Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Most children's homes are at least good and the home run by the local authority is outstanding, as is the special school. The fostering service is good and the adoption service is satisfactory. The large majority of early years and child care provision, as well as primary schools, were good in 2009 and remain so. The number of good or better secondary schools increased in the last year, but three of the six schools, as well as the pupil referral unit, remain satisfactory. Post-16 education is satisfactory overall, but is the weakest area of provision locally. The general further education college is good, but too much provision in school sixth forms is no better than satisfactory. Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe and do well educationally are good or better in the very large majority of settings and services.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a broad balance of strengths and areas for development, with no areas requiring priority action. The local authority's work to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements is good.

National performance measures show that a large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. Performance is as good as in similar areas for most measures of educational attainment. Children in the Reception Year of primary school do as well as the average elsewhere, although test and examination results for 11- and 16-year-olds have fallen below the similar area average in recent years. Provisional GCSE results for 2010 suggest notable improvement. The number of young people at age 19 who gain qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs, or two A levels, is in line with the average for similar areas. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, training or work fell slightly last year, but remains high compared to figures for similar areas.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools and sixth forms in schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve educational outcomes for 11-year-olds and continue to improve educational outcomes for 16-year-olds.
- Increase the number of young people in education, training or work.

## **Outcomes for children and young people**

Support for children and young people in living healthy lives is good in the very large majority of settings and services. Most performance measures are in line with the average elsewhere. One notable exception is the very good performance in reducing the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant. Over the ten years to 2008, Bracknell Forest saw the single biggest reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate of all local authorities in England. In contrast however, the number of young people screened for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted infection, is well below average and amongst the poorest performances seen nationally. The local authority and its partners are having some success in tackling childhood obesity with a recent and notable drop in the number of 11-year-olds who are seriously overweight.

Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe are good in the very large majority of settings and services. Safeguarding and services for looked after children were judged to be good in an inspection in 2008. Child protection services are very well managed and work to assess the needs of children is good. The different agencies involved have a clear understanding of when to refer children to social care services and this is applied consistently in practice. Areas for improvement include the need to take children's views consistently into account when planning support for them. The number of children and young people who say they have been bullied is above average for similar areas, and local plans recognise the need to respond to their concerns. Road traffic accidents causing death or serious injury to children, reduced for the second consecutive year in 2008, and are well below the figures for similar areas, as are the numbers of children who have to go to hospital because they are injured unintentionally or deliberately. Children in care continue to experience more disruptions to care placements than is the case nationally.

Overall, the very large majority of services and settings give good support to children and young people to achieve well and enjoy their learning. Children in the Reception Year do as well as the average for similar areas, with consistent gains made over the last three years. In contrast 11-year-olds do not do as well as the average for similar areas and provisional results for 2010 suggest little improvement. Therefore, attainment for 11-year-olds needs further improvement to build on the good start that children make in the early years. The gap in attainment between the majority of children and those from low-income families, as well as those with special educational needs, is slow to close, albeit that numbers in such groups are very small and performance fluctuates year to year. GCSE results for 16-year-olds are improving, but remain below average for similar areas. Outcomes for vulnerable groups at this age are also improving each year. No secondary schools have been in an Ofsted category of concern since 2006, but performance across the borough has been mixed. Provisional GCSE results for all six secondary schools suggest improvement and none are below the national minimum standard of 30% 5+ GCSE A\* to C including English and mathematics. The local authority recognised

that the number of children permanently excluded from school was higher than in other areas and has devoted additional resources to tackling this. The most recent local data indicate a marked fall from the previous year and the local authority continues to work with schools to reduce exclusions and to provide additional support for pupils deemed to be at risk.

Almost all settings and services give children and young people good encouragement to get involved in decision making. A programme to promote young people's rights and responsibilities is well established in local schools. An active youth council is in place with plans to strengthen further the representation of young people from community-based organisations. A comparatively high proportion of children and young people are involved in organised leisure activities outside of school. By most measures, the youth offending service works well. The number of young people convicted for an offence for the first time has reduced significantly over the last few years and re-offending rates are broadly average. Although custodial sentences after conviction appear high compared to similar areas, the actual number involved is very low.

Children and young people get good support from the large majority of services to help them do well in adult life, but the contribution of schools is mixed in this respect. The number of young people at age 19 who gain good qualifications is broadly average and improving at a faster rate than elsewhere, with the borough's best-ever A level results achieved in 2009. Provisional A level results for 2010 indicate that this improvement has been maintained. Young people from low-income families have also seen improving results in recent years despite a dip in 2009. Compared to similar areas, the number of young people staying on in education or training after the compulsory school-leaving age continues to be well below average and the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in work, education or training is well above. Recent local data show some improvement on both these measures. The local authority and its partners are working closely with neighbouring local authorities to share resources and better meet local demand, for example through the development of diploma courses which started this September. Effective steps are being taken to ensure that every young person leaving care has a place to live which meets their needs.

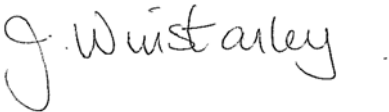
### **Prospects for improvement**

Children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. The quality of much targeted and universal provision is good, but the overall effectiveness of secondary schools and sixth forms in school is not as good as that found nationally. The local authority recognises the need to further improve educational standards, particularly for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and to keep pace with the better rates of improvement seen elsewhere in recent years. Clear plans are in place to do this with an increasing focus on early intervention and preventative services. The morale of staff in front-line child protection services is high with very good support from experienced and accessible managers. High quality annual appraisals are undertaken for all staff and clear action plans for professional development are monitored through supervision. Workforce

development activities are well underway with all service managers and almost all schools completing a 'safer workforce' training programme.

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 "J. Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment