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Mrs Edwina Grant
Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mrs Grant

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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.

Central Bedfordshire Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Central Bedfordshire Council perform adequately. This is the same as in 2010. The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and provision helps children to stay safe and enjoy their learning. Areas of strength remain as last year. As found elsewhere, changes to school provision are taking place and some lower, middle and upper schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgments for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment. The areas for improvement have not changed significantly.

An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection carried out in March 2011 identified an area of strength, practice that met requirements and five areas for development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. All issues identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements have been addressed with significant improvements reported.

Strengths

- The large majority of early years and childcare is good or better with a further increase in the proportion of effective provision during the year. The proportion of at least good childminders has increased and a very large majority of regulated childcare providers are now good or better.
- For those aged under five, a very large majority of nursery and lower school provision continues to be good or better. Almost all lower schools are good or better and there is no longer any inadequate provision.
- As last year, specialist provision is of good quality overall. Two special schools have merged creating one all-age special school. Four of the five local authority special schools are good or better as is one of the two special school sixth forms. A small independent special school for children with dyslexia and associated difficulties located in the area is also good. For looked after children, private and voluntary fostering and adoption arrangements are outstanding. One of the two local authority children's homes is outstanding, the other is satisfactory. The large majority of private and voluntary run homes commissioned by the local authority are good or better. The local authority adoption agency is good with some outstanding features.
- Educational attainment at 16 and 19 years has improved in line with national increases. Although attainment of five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics continues to be below similar areas, published indicators are in line with national averages. Attainment of both

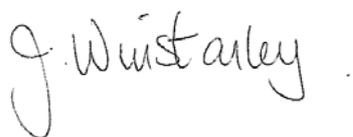
level 2 and level 3 qualifications at 19 years is in line with both similar areas and national averages.

Areas for further improvement

- As last year too few middle and upper schools and school sixth forms are good or better. Only one of five middle schools inspected in the academic year improved a grade and one was issued with a notice to improve. However, the middle school identified with weaknesses in 2010 has improved and is now providing satisfactory provision. Two-thirds of sixth forms are only satisfactory and there is no outstanding post-16 provision.
- There has been no improvement in standards achieved by five- and 11-year-olds. The proportion of children making the expected progress as they move through primary school is below both similar areas and national averages. Attainment was previously in line with similar areas and national averages at the age of 11; however, results for 2011 show that 2% fewer children achieved the expected Level 4 in both English and mathematics than last year. Nationally it stayed the same.
- Closing the gap in standards achieved by all young people and vulnerable groups, including those with special educational needs and looked after children, is appropriately identified as a priority for action in the local authority's children and young people's plan. Attainment continues to be below similar areas and the national average for 16- and 19-year-olds from low-income families. The gap between 19-year-olds and their peers in Central Bedfordshire is getting wider at level 2, but closing more quickly than elsewhere for the higher level 3 qualifications.

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