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Mr Andrew Ireland
Corporate Director for Families and Social Care
Children, Families & Education
Kent County Council
Room 2.39, Sessions House
County Hall, Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XQ

Dear Mr Ireland

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.

Kent County Council children's services assessment 2011

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs poorly (1) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|

Children's services in Kent County Council perform poorly. In October 2010 a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children judged these services, together with capacity to improve safeguarding, to be inadequate. In the light of this evidence, children's services were assessed as performing poorly overall. The local authority recognises the importance of strengthening safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children however, until further safeguarding inspection evidence is available, the children's services assessment for 2011 remains performs poorly.

The weaknesses in safeguarding and services for looked after children are significant. However, the very large majority of settings and institutions, such as schools and colleges, inspected by Ofsted are good or better and the overall effectiveness of early years and childcare settings as well as secondary schools has improved. Most provision helps children and young people learn and stay safe. As is the case elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and some schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in this assessment.

Strengths

- Early years and childcare provision has improved well and the large majority is good or better. Childcare settings are particularly strong while two-thirds of children's centres are good with none inadequate.
- For children under five, the large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good and some is outstanding. Very young children's level of development has improved significantly since the last children's services assessment and is now in line with similar areas and better than nationally. For children from families with low incomes there has also been significant improvement although there is still work to be done to help these children catch up with their peers in Kent.
- The overall effectiveness of secondary schools has improved and the large majority are good or outstanding although three are still inadequate. At Key Stage 4 standards achieved by 16-year-olds in national examinations have improved steadily and are just above those in similar areas of the country. Young people from Black, Asian and mixed ethnic groups do better than their peers in the county.
- All but four of the local authority's 24 special schools are good or better with none inadequate and likewise the majority of the independent special schools located in the county. Almost all special school sixth forms are good or better as are residential special schools. Standards achieved by young people with special educational needs who follow the national

curriculum improved in 2010 and are now the same as is seen nationally and better than in similar parts of the country.

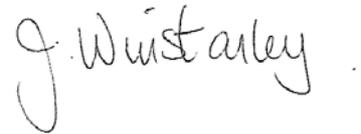
- The large majority of post-16 provision is good or better although only two of the five general further education colleges are good or better and one independent specialist college is now inadequate. The number of young people achieving level 2 qualifications, equivalent to five A* to C GCSE qualifications, or two good A levels by the age of 19 are in line with similar parts of the country and recent improvement has been similar to that seen nationally.
- For looked after children, local authority fostering and adoption services are good as are private fostering arrangements. Local authority children's homes have improved with four of the five now good and the other adequate. Where the local authority commissions services, the large majority of placements are with good or better fostering or adoption agencies or in good or better children's homes.

Areas for further improvement

- There are serious weaknesses in services to safeguard children and young people and capacity to improve was judged inadequate. The local authority is implementing an improvement plan to tackle these weaknesses but the effectiveness of actions is yet to be assessed through inspection.
- Services for looked after children and young people are inadequate and most outcomes for these children and young people require significant improvement. This is particularly so for health and educational outcomes before the age of 16. Capacity to improve this service is, however, adequate.
- There has been little improvement in the overall effectiveness of primary schools since the last assessment, fewer than in similar areas are good or better and more than last year are now inadequate. Standards achieved by 11-year-olds however are in line with similar areas and the country overall, having improved at the same rate as they have nationally in recent years with provisional results for 2011 showing better improvement.
- Standards achieved by 16- and 19-year-olds from families with low incomes have improved, but remain below those achieved by this group nationally. The gaps between these young people and others in Kent are not closing quickly enough, particularly for higher level qualifications.
- As in 2010, while there are no inadequate pupil referral units, only just over half are good or better which is less than seen in similar parts of the country and elsewhere.
- The recent inspection of youth offending work in Kent found two of the three areas for improvement require substantial improvement.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment