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Mr Martin Pratt  
Corporate Director, Children and Learning  
Luton Borough Council  
3rd Floor, Unity House  
111 Stuart Street  
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Dear Mr Pratt

## 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.

## Luton Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs excellently (4)</b>
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Children's services in Luton Borough Council perform excellently. Performance has improved from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall. Most provision supports children and young people well in staying safe and the large majority helps them to enjoy their learning. Areas of strength remain the same as last year with improvement in the proportion of provision that is good or better. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary provision are taking place and some secondary schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found much that is satisfactory and no priority areas requiring urgent attention. Improvement is reported in the five other areas for development identified at a previous inspection, including the timeliness and management of initial assessments.

### Strengths

- The large majority of early years and childcare provision is good or better. The proportion of good or better providers has increased over the last year with a very large majority of regulated childcare settings now being at least good. Four of the six children's centres inspected for the first time during the year are good or better.
- For children under five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good and some is outstanding. The proportion of good or better provision continues to increase and is higher than that found in similar areas and nationally. Over time, the proportion of five-year-olds achieving a good standard of development continues to rise, but from a low base and remains below national averages.
- A large majority of secondary schools and all sixth form provision is good or outstanding. Two outstanding schools have become academies. Four of the five secondary schools inspected during the year maintained their good grade or improved to outstanding. Almost all secondary schools have good or outstanding standards of behaviour and the poor attendance of some young people is reducing steadily. After the age of 16, provision continues to be of high quality with all settings good or better. Both further education colleges and the sixth form college are outstanding. The secondary sixth form and the special school sixth form are both good.
- At the age of 16, standards continue to be below national averages but in line with similar areas, with the proportion of all young people achieving the expected level rising more quickly than elsewhere. Asian students

attain better standards than their peers in Luton and those from mixed ethnic groups do better than those in similar areas. A higher proportion of Black students attain the expected level than in similar areas and national averages.

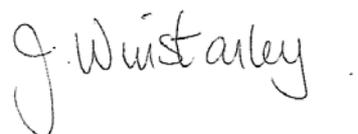
- The proportion of 16-year-olds from low-income families achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, and of 19-year-olds attaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications, is well above average and the gap with all young people in Luton is much smaller than that found elsewhere. At level 3, the gap is reducing steadily, but widened slightly at level 2 in 2010.
- For children and young people with special educational needs, provision is at least good. One of the local authority's three special schools and a pupil referral unit are outstanding. More 16-year-olds with special educational needs attain five A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, than found in similar areas and nationally. The gap in achievement with their peers in Luton has reduced over the past four years.
- For looked after children, services are usually good. An inspection of the local authority fostering agency in June 2011 reported good improvement from a previous inspection and improving outcomes for children and young people who use the service. The local authority adoption agency is good and the large majority of independent fostering arrangements are good or outstanding. The very large majority of private and voluntary run children's homes commissioned by the local authority to place children in their care are good or better.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- The proportion of good or better primary schools has improved over the last year, but progress and educational standards remain as weaknesses. This year's tests for 11-year-olds show no improvement in those attaining the expected level in both English and mathematics.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment