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8 November 2011

Ms Gail Tolley  
Director of Children's Services  
Milton Keynes Council  
Saxon Court  
502 Avebury Boulevard  
Milton Keynes  
Buckinghamshire MK9 3HS

Dear Ms Tolley

## 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.

## Milton Keynes Council children's services assessment 2011

|                                |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs well (3) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|

Children's services in Milton Keynes Council perform well. This performance has been maintained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding and few are now inadequate. Most are good at helping children and young people to keep safe and almost all at supporting them to learn. Educational standards at the ages of five, 11 and 16 are rising steadily and mostly faster than nationally over the last four years, but attainment for some key vulnerable groups remains below average and gaps between these vulnerable groups and their peers are not closing consistently. Areas of strength are largely the same as last year, more provision is now good or better and only one school remains inadequate. Good progress has been made in the key areas for further development identified in 2010. As found elsewhere, changes to schools are taking place and more have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

In 2011, Ofsted's annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found two areas of strength and many satisfactory areas of practice. Four areas for development included two identified in the previous inspection in November 2009 that have been addressed, but not yet achieved the desired outcomes. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. Inspection shows excellent safeguarding in youth offending work.

### Strengths

- The majority of provision for early years and childcare is good and some is outstanding. Less childminding is now inadequate, more childcare is good or better and all four children's centres inspected are good or outstanding.
- The very large majority of provision for early years education in nursery and primary schools remains good or better. Achievement for children aged five at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with similar areas, although it is above the national average and has improved faster than national figures, rising sharply last year. Above average numbers of young children from low-income families show a good level of development. The gap with others of the same age closed significantly in 2010 to the national average and smaller than in similar areas. The local authority reports further closure in 2011.
- The large majority of primary schools are now good or better, addressing a key area for further development from last year. Of these, three schools that are good or outstanding have now become academies, two of the three schools are no longer inadequate and one school no longer requires significant improvement. The school that remains inadequate is making satisfactory progress with very effective support from the local authority.

Most children make average progress between the ages of seven and 11, and by the age of 11, reach average standards, addressing a key area for further development from last year. Provisional results for 2011 show continuing improvement.

- The large majority of secondary schools are good or outstanding. Since last year, five good or outstanding schools and their sixth forms have become academies and one school no longer requires significant improvement. Standards for 16-year-olds achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, have risen to the national average, addressing a key area for further development from last year, but remain below those for similar local authorities. The large majority of secondary schools have good or outstanding behaviour and poor attendance by some young people is reducing steadily.
- After the age of 16, most school sixth forms are good or outstanding, but the college of further education is only satisfactory. At the age of 17, fewer young people are in education or training than in similar areas, but by the age of 18, average and increasing numbers are in education, training or employment, including care leavers. Average and steadily increasing numbers of 19-year-olds now gain higher level qualifications, addressing a key area for development, although fewer than in similar local authorities.
- For young people not in mainstream education, the large majority of provision is now good or better. Special schools show improvement and all three pupil referral units are now good, addressing weaknesses in 2010. Following a fundamental review of residential provision, the one inadequate residential special school will no longer offer residential provision.
- For looked after children, all arrangements for adoption and fostering are good or outstanding. Two of the three children's homes maintained by the local authority are good, but the third is only satisfactory, as are the two children's homes that are independently run. Of the services commissioned by the local authority, the very large majority of providers are good or better, including the large majority of children's homes.

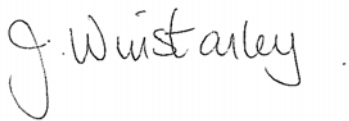
### **Areas for further improvement**

- The local authority has prioritised further improvement in the achievement of some key vulnerable groups. At the age of 16, attainment for young people from low-income families remains below average, although showing good improvement, and the gap with their peers in Milton Keynes shows little sign of closing. Attainment for young people with special educational needs, although improved, remains well below average and the gap with their peers has got bigger. For minority ethnic groups, attainment is mostly below average and the gap for the Black ethnic group is getting bigger. By the age of 19, below average numbers of young people from low-income families gain higher level qualifications and

the gap with their peers shows little reduction. Fewer 19-year-olds than elsewhere gain level 2 qualifications. The gap in achievement for those from low-income families and their peers is bigger than elsewhere and has reduced more slowly. Looked after children show below average achievement, although the local authority reports significant improvement in 2011.

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