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Dr Janette Karklins
Director of Children, Young People and Learning
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Dear Dr Karklins

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.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Bracknell Forest Borough Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and most provision helps children and young people learn and stay safe. Early years settings and primary schools continue to improve although the quality of secondary schools, school sixth forms and specialist provision remains mixed.

In July 2011, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified two strengths, many areas that meet requirements and only one area for development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. The areas for development identified in the first unannounced inspection, in 2010, have been resolved fully.

Strengths

- The very large majority of childcare and childminding is good or outstanding and all childminding is now satisfactory or better.
- For children under the age of five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is now good or better.
- The large majority of primary schools continue to be good or outstanding. The local authority has provided good targeted support to the schools in Ofsted categories of concern. Only one school remains inadequate and it is now making good progress.
- For young people, achievement at Key Stage 4 is in line with similar areas and the national average and improved well in 2010. The four year improvement trend has mirrored that in similar areas. Provisional results for 2011 indicate that good improvement has been sustained and the gap between the very small numbers of young people from low-income backgrounds and the majority of 16-year-olds is closing.
- For young people over the age of 16 the general further education college is good. The one school sixth form inspected this year improved from satisfactory to good and three of the six school sixth forms are now good or better, though three are still satisfactory. The local authority and its partners have put in place a range of strategies to improve education and training opportunities and to reduce the number of young people who are not in learning or work, but it is too early to judge their full impact.

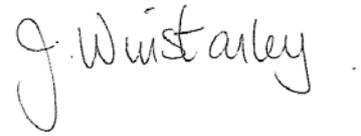
- Achievement at the age of 19 is in line with the average for similar areas, with performance at level 3 that is also above the national average. Provisional results for 2011 indicate that more young people than ever have gained a qualification at this level. Gaps in attainment between young people from low-income backgrounds and the majority of 19-year-olds in the borough are closing, but remain wider than the national average.
- The local authority's fostering service is good and its children's home is outstanding. The large majority of children's homes commissioned by the local authority to provide for looked after children placed out of the borough are good or better.
- The youth offending service requires only minimal improvement in its safeguarding work, but needs more improvement in its work to reduce the risk of harm and prevent re-offending by young people.

Areas for further improvement

- Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage are in line with the national average, but below the average for similar areas. Provisional figures for 2011 show an improvement, with the gap between the lower-attaining children and the majority of five-year-olds closing. However, improvement overall over the last four years to 2010 is not as good as the national trend, so the gap in performance between children in Bracknell Forest and children elsewhere is widening.
- While standards at Key Stage 2 remain in line with similar areas and the national average, the progress made in mathematics between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is not as good. Provisional Key Stage 2 results for 2011 indicate an improvement, however this performance is now no better than it was in 2006, while performance elsewhere has continued to improve.
- Only a half of six secondary schools are good or better and the one inspected during the year was issued with a notice to improve. The small number of 16-year olds from low-income families and those with special educational needs do not do as well as their counterparts in similar areas or nationally.
- The quality of specialist provision is mixed. The local authority special school and its sixth form are good, however the pupil referral unit, an independent special school, the adoption agency and the only children's centre yet to be inspected are only adequate.

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