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Ms Anna Wright
Director of Education and Children's Services
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Education and Children's Services
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Dear Ms Wright

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.

Reading Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Reading Borough Council perform well. This good performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and provision helps children and young people stay safe and learn well. The strengths and areas for development remain much the same as last year. A number of schools that were good or outstanding at their last inspection have become academies. These inspection judgements have been taken into account in making this assessment.

Ofsted's last inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection was carried out in November 2010 when two strengths, many satisfactory areas and a number of areas for development were identified. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention.

Strengths

- The large majority of childminding and childcare provision is good or better and the proportion of providers that are good or better has increased since 2010. The number of childminders overall has increased and more than one in five are now outstanding.
- For children under five, the majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good and some is outstanding. Levels of development achieved in the Early Years Foundation Stage by children from low-income families are consistently above the average for their counterparts elsewhere and improving well. Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage remain below the average for similar areas, but the gap is closing as the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in Reading continues to improve.
- Five of the seven secondary schools are good or better; the other two are satisfactory. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is in line with the average for similar areas and nationally. The attainment gap between young people from low-income families and the majority of 16-year-olds in Reading is closing. Persistent absence from school is below average and the proportion of young people staying on in education and training at the age of 17 is above average.
- All special schools are good or better, as they were in 2010, and the special school sixth form is outstanding. The pupil referral unit is satisfactory with inspector's judging that good partnership work with the local authority is helping to strengthen the school's leadership at all levels.

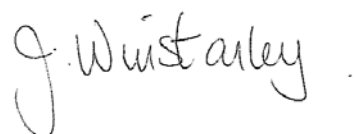
- Five of the seven school sixth forms are good or better, as they were in 2010, and the other two are satisfactory. Achievement of level 2 and level 3 qualifications at the age of 19 is in line with the average for similar areas, with a clear trend of improvement over the last four years.
- The local authority adoption service and two of the three private and voluntary agencies are good. The third is satisfactory. All children's homes in the borough remain good or better.
- The youth offending service requires only minimal improvement to its safeguarding work and moderate improvement in preventing re-offending by young people and reducing the risk of harm.

Areas for further improvement

- In 2010, 11-year-olds achieved as well as the average for similar areas, but provisional results show a drop of three percentage points this year. The quality of primary schools remains mixed with nearly a half that are only satisfactory. Recent inspection grades show some schools are improving while others are not. Two primary schools are now inadequate.
- The local authority has had mixed success in improving pockets of under achievement and in closing attainment gaps. In 2010, Black and Asian young people at the age of 16 did not achieve as well as the average for all young people in Reading and did worse than the average for their counterparts nationally. Young people from low-income backgrounds at the age of 19 continue to achieve well below the average for this group elsewhere. While the attainment gap at level 2 is closing, this is yet not the case at level 3.
- The last inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements highlighted a number of areas for development, which include reducing the high rates of re-referral and improving the timeliness of assessments and the effectiveness of case tracking. Strong quality assurance arrangements are helping to ensure that the views of children and young people shape the way services are improved.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment