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Ms Jenny Coles
Director of Children, Safeguarding and Specialist Services
Hertfordshire County Council
Children Schools & Families
County Hall, Pegs Lane
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Dear Ms Coles

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.

Hertfordshire County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Hertfordshire County Council perform well. This performance has been sustained since 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Nine good or outstanding secondary schools, eight with sixth forms, have recently converted to academy status. This has been taken into account in the 2011 assessment. Improvements have been made in some of the areas for development identified in the 2010 assessment, specifically the rate of progress made by 16-year-olds with special educational needs.

A full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in 2010 judged provision to be adequate overall, with some good aspects in services for looked after children. A more recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection carried out in 2011 found three main strengths, several aspects that meet requirements and four areas for development. Concerns identified in the previous unannounced inspection in 2009 have all been addressed and there are no priority actions for urgent attention.

Strengths

- The quality of nursery and primary school provision continues to be high with most provision judged at inspection to be good or outstanding.
- At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, very young children do as well as children elsewhere. The gap in achievement between young children from low-income families and others of the same age in Hertfordshire has widened recently but is still smaller than in similar areas.
- Educational standards for most children and young people at age 11 and 16 continue to be consistently above the national averages. In 2010 standards at age 11 were in line with similar areas and above the national average. Provisional results for 2011 show that the performance of both girls and boys aged 11 years old has declined slightly. At age 16, the numbers of young people achieving at least 5 A* to C grades at GCSE (including English and mathematics) in 2010 were higher than the national average and in line with similar areas. This has been an improving trend for the last four years. The numbers of children with special educational needs at age 16 who achieve at least 5 good GCSEs are also increasing at a faster rate than for all other pupils at this age and the achievement gap with their peers has narrowed recently.
- At age 19, standards continue to be at least in line with similar areas and more young people achieve level 2 and level 3 qualifications, good GCSE and 'A' level equivalents, than in similar areas and nationally. The

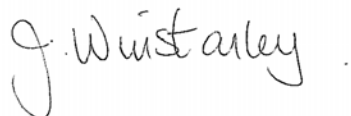
- achievement gap at level 2 between those from low-income families and all other young people is closing faster than in similar areas.
- Special school provision continues to be of consistently high quality, with much that is outstanding. This is a further improvement since 2010. Nearly all special schools and the pupil referral units are now good or outstanding.
 - Higher numbers of young people participate in education or training than in similar areas. Good progress has been made in reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training resulting in performance that is now better than in similar areas.
 - The large majority of children's homes, many of which are commissioned by the local authority are good or better and, as last year, three children's homes managed by the local authority are outstanding. All local fostering and adoption agencies are good.
 - A recent survey by Ofsted on best practice in commissioning young people's services judged Hertfordshire to be making good use of data and research to identify and work with young people most likely to benefit from early intervention and targeted youth support.

Areas for further improvement

- Some areas of provision remain only satisfactory. Despite improvement in early years provision overall, almost 30% of childminders remain satisfactory and 14 are inadequate. The overall effectiveness of children's centres is variable, with four of the seven inspected judged to be satisfactory.
- Too many secondary schools remain satisfactory. Two came out of an Ofsted category of concern in the latter part of 2010, but a further two secondary schools have recently received a notice to improve. Monitoring visits show good progress and support from the local authority. Similarly, too much secondary school sixth form provision is satisfactory with one now judged to be inadequate.
- The gap in achievement between 16-year-olds from low-income families who achieve at least five A* to C grades at GCSE (including English and mathematics) and all other pupils of the same age has widened in the last two years.
- Eleven of the children's homes commissioned by the local authority are satisfactory and one is inadequate.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment