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Mr Mark Charters
Director of Education and Social Care
London Borough of Bexley
Bexley Council
Hill View
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Dear Mr Charters

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.

London Borough of Bexley children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Bexley perform adequately, as they did in 2009 and 2010. The very large majority of services, settings and institutions are good or better at helping children and young people to stay safe, but only the majority are good or better at helping them to enjoy their learning and achieve well. Improving the overall effectiveness of primary and secondary school provision was an area for further development in the 2010 children's services assessment. A number of schools have now become academies and, taken together, more secondary provision is now good or better than last year. However, the overall effectiveness of primary schools is below that found in similar areas and across the country as a whole. Overall, too high a proportion of services and settings for children and young people, both in universal and specialist provision, remain satisfactory and this is pivotal to the children's services judgement for 2011.

Ofsted's last unannounced inspection of children's social care contact, referral and assessment arrangements that took place in October 2010 identified two strengths, many satisfactory aspects of practice and three areas for development. There were no very serious weaknesses requiring urgent action.

Strengths

- The overall effectiveness of registered early years and childcare provision is generally good and the quality of childminding has notably improved over the last year and is better than found in similar areas and nationally. No childminders are now inadequate. The three children's centres that have been inspected are all judged to be good.
- The large majority of nursery school and Early Years Foundation Stage provision in primary schools are at least good. There has been a significant improvement in the number of five-year-olds achieving a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year at school and performance is better than found nationally. Improvement has taken place at a faster pace than in similar areas and nationally since 2007.
- The large majority of secondary schools and academies are good or better and no secondary provision is in an Ofsted category of concern, which is an improvement on last year. Secondary schools are especially good at helping young people learn about keeping themselves safe. Ten of the 12 secondary sixth forms are good or outstanding, which means that the large majority of post-16 provision is good overall.
- Bexley's GCSE results have improved at a slightly faster pace than elsewhere over the last four years and the number of 16-year-olds gaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, remains above the

national average. A higher proportion of 16-year-olds from low-income families are also gaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, than is average across the country and performance shows year on year improvement. The achievement gap between these young people and their peers in the borough has narrowed again in 2010 and is smaller than in similar areas and nationally.

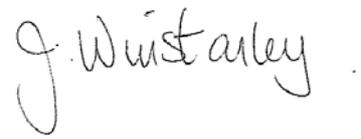
- Performance is in line with or above the appropriate comparator for a very large majority of published indicators. Educational outcomes are at least in line with similar areas and the national average at ages five, 11, 16 and 19.
- The local authority has no children's homes of its own. Two thirds of the nine children's homes it is currently using are good or better.
- A very recent inspection of the local authority's fostering agency has found it to be outstanding. The local authority's adoption agency was judged to be good at the last inspection in October 2009.

Areas for further improvement

- The overall effectiveness of primary schools remains lower than in similar areas and nationally. While none are inadequate, 46% are no better than satisfactory. Provisional data for 2011 show that test results for 11-year-olds have not improved further this year.
- Inspections show that the quality of provision for some vulnerable children is not as good as found elsewhere. Only two out of five of the local authority's special schools are now good or better, two are satisfactory and one is currently inadequate. This school is making satisfactory improvement. The borough-wide Bexley Pupil Referral Service, providing education for those permanently excluded, at risk of exclusion or unable to attend school, is satisfactory overall.
- Although improving, a lower proportion of five-year-olds from low-income families are achieving a good level of development than is average across all local authorities. The achievement gap between children from low-income families and their peers in the borough has widened and is larger than is average for similar areas and across the country as a whole.
- Childhood obesity and teenage pregnancy rates continue to be priorities for the area.

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