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Mrs Edwina Grant  
Director of Children's Services  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Priory House, Monks Walk  
Chicksands, Shefford  
Central Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ

Dear Mrs Grant

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes 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 data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against 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 2009, 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.

## Central Bedfordshire Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs adequately (2)</b>
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Children's services in Central Bedfordshire Council perform adequately.

Schools in Central Bedfordshire are organised on a lower, middle and upper school system. For the purposes of this assessment middle schools are deemed to be secondary schools. Key Stage 2 tests are taken in middle schools and Key Stage 4 examinations in upper schools.

A majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Overall there has been an increase in the proportion of good provision since the unitary authority was formed in 2009. Much of the early years and childcare provision is good, as are nursery and primary schools and most special schools. However, secondary schools are not doing as well and inspections show that less than half are good and one is failing to provide a satisfactory standard of education. One primary school was also judged to be inadequate during the last year; there had been no unsatisfactory schools in the previous year. Although provision for post-16 is never less than satisfactory, only a third is good. One of two local authority children's homes is good and the other adequate. Private and voluntary run children's homes are at least satisfactory.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Children achieve well in the early years, but fewer than in similar areas make the expected progress in English and mathematics at primary school. Results in national tests and examinations are similar to the national average for 11- and 16-year-olds, but below their peers in similar areas. Not as many 19-year-olds from low-income families in Central Bedfordshire gain the higher level 3 qualifications as those from similar areas. However, locally held data show good progress in the number gaining level 2 qualifications over time.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools and post-16 provision so that more are good or better.
- Ensure more children make the expected two levels progress by the age of 11.
- Increase the number of young people from low-income families who gain qualifications at the age of 19.

## Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. Nearly all childminders and schools are good at this, although one of the two children's homes and the college do not do as well and are only satisfactory. Improvements have been made to the provision of mental health services and more young people report they have good relationships with friends and family than found nationally. The emotional and behavioural health of children in care is good. More children say they enjoy access to parks and play areas than found elsewhere. Levels of obesity among five- and 11-year-olds are low; however, local data show that obesity rates are rising for the older group. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than nationally, although locally agreed targets for the last year were not met. Fewer 16-year-olds reported that they had recently been drunk or taken drugs in 2010 than in 2009.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. Ofsted inspection of childminders, schools, colleges and children's homes confirm this. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified a number of strengths in the arrangements for supporting families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. For example, families are fully involved in assessments and actions planned to support them. Child protection processes for disabled children are strong. However, not all services are using agreed assessment approaches effectively to improve outcomes for children in need. Recent data reflect good provision for looked after children with better than average stability in their placements and timeliness of adoptions. A higher than average number of initial assessments and all reviews of child protection plans are completed within the expected timescales. As a relatively new local authority there is limited validated data about safety in the community. However, in a recent survey fewer young people said that they feel bullied than elsewhere.

Almost all child carers and nursery, primary and special schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. However, secondary schools and colleges are not as good, with about a third judged to be only adequate in this area. Local providers successfully help young children achieve the expected level in personal and social education and communication skills by the time they start school. However, while at primary school, fewer children make progress at the expected rate and results in national tests are not as good as those in similar areas. Examination results for 16-year-olds are similar to the national picture, but not as good as in similar areas, with far fewer obtaining two or more high grades in science than elsewhere. Those from low-income families make good progress in secondary schools and by the age of 16 the gap between their achievement and their peers is not as wide as elsewhere. Behaviour is usually good in secondary schools and the number of secondary school pupils who are often absent from school is well below the national average. Young people with special educational needs do not do as well in secondary schools as similar groups nationally.

Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision making and activity in their communities. Successful arrangements, involving 4,000 children and young people, informed the Children and Young People's Plan in identifying key areas for improvement across services in Central Bedfordshire. Local targets have been set to reduce the rates of re-offending and agencies working together are targeting action to increase the rate of reduction, as local monitoring is showing this is not happening at a fast enough rate. The youth offending service performs well against the national indicators and has good capacity and capability to sustain and improve performance.

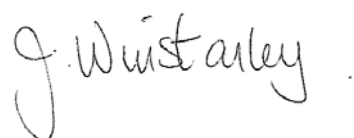
The local authority knows that not all young people do as well as they can at the age of 19 and some targets, such as those for reducing the number of young people not in education, training or work, have been missed. Improving outcomes for those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, including those from low-income families, is a key priority. Recent monitoring by the local authority has identified limited progress and the need for clearer plans to address underlying factors limiting progress. However, most young people receive good support in schools and colleges to gain the skills and qualifications needed for future jobs. The number achieving good qualifications at 19 years of age is in line with national figures, although below similar areas. Almost all care leavers are found suitable accommodation.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Good progress has been made in establishing strategic partnerships and identifying the right priorities to improve outcomes for all children, young people and their families. The Children and Young People's Plan reflects a good analysis of the strengths in local provision, identifies clear actions for further improvement and sets ambitious targets in many areas. A recent review of the plan illustrates clearly where delivery groups and partnerships have been successful and focuses on what still needs to be done to achieve key priorities. Performance information is being used regularly for monitoring and evaluating progress. The recent Ofsted inspection of front-line child protection services found high staff morale, improved numbers of qualified social workers and good opportunities for workforce development. Services commissioned to meet individual or specific needs are usually good or outstanding. An Ofsted monitoring visit to a weaker school shows appropriate priority is being given to support improvement. However, there is more to do to increase the number of secondary schools and post-16 provision that are good or better.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment