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Ms Carolyn Godfrey
Director of the Department for Children and Education
Wiltshire County Council
County Hall, Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire BA14 8JB

Dear Ms Godfrey

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.

Wiltshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Wiltshire County Council perform well.

The large majority of all settings and services inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Fostering and adoption services are good. The local authority's children's home is outstanding and almost all of the homes run by private and voluntary organisations are good or better. The quality of childcare has improved over the last year. This has strengthened existing good provision, but too much childminding remains satisfactory. The large majority of secondary schools and post-16 education providers are good or better, but one secondary school was judged inadequate in the last year. Very little other provision is inadequate, but over a third of primary schools are only satisfactory. Four of the six special schools are good or better, but the one pupil referral unit is satisfactory.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found many areas for development which out-weighed the key strengths and satisfactory features. However, there were no very serious weaknesses requiring priority action.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. Test and examination results at all stages of children's education are in line with the average for similar areas but none are above. For five- and 16-year-olds, results are improving at a faster rate than the average elsewhere. The local authority has been successful in improving the progress made by the lowest achieving children in the Reception year and in closing the gap between them and the majority at this age. Educational outcomes for young people from low-income families and those with special educational needs are also improving at the age of 16 and the gap at this age is closing. However, the trend of improvement for these groups at the age of 11 is not as secure and the attainment gap at the end of primary school is slower to close.

Key areas for further development

- Close the gap in attainment between the majority of 11-year-olds and those from low-income families, as well as those with special educational needs.
- Improve primary schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve the overall quality of childminding.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement to children and young people in living healthy lives. Action has been taken to improve support for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties. The number of

seriously overweight children is comparatively low and falling faster than the average for five-year-olds. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is below average, but has risen in recent years against the falling national trend. Screening for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted infection, is well below the national average. Participation in sport and regular exercise has improved in line with the national figures over the last five years.

Arrangements to help children and young people to stay safe are good in the very large majority of individual settings and services. Safeguarding overall was judged adequate in 2008. A recent inspection of front-line child protection services identified many more areas for development than key strengths or satisfactory features, but there were no very serious weaknesses requiring priority action. Partnership work between the different agencies involved contributes effectively to safeguarding children and young people. Child protection enquiries are prioritised appropriately and always carried out by qualified social workers. Two new county-wide teams have been established to improve further the responsiveness and consistency of child protection services. Areas for improvement include the quality of work to assess the needs of children and the way important information is recorded. The most recent data show deterioration in the number of assessments completed on time which has fallen below the national average. Services for children in care were judged adequate in 2008.

Provision to help children and young people achieve well educationally and enjoy their learning is good in most settings and services. However, one in three primary schools are only satisfactory and this is not as good as the national picture. At every stage of children's education, test and examinations results are in line with the average for similar areas. Results for five- and 16-year-olds have improved over the last three years faster than the average in similar areas. Every secondary school met the national minimum standards for attainment in 2009. Results for 11-year-olds have not shown the same consistent trend of improvement, but unvalidated data for 2010 suggest performance is now in line with the national average. The local authority is working closely with schools that need additional challenge and support. Together, they have been successful in improving outcomes for the lowest achieving children in the reception year and at the age of 16, but the attainment gap at the end of primary school is slower to close. The number of secondary school pupils with poor attendance is comparatively low and falling, as is the number of permanent exclusions.

Arrangements to encourage children and young people to get involved in decision-making and in their local communities are good in the very large majority of settings and services. This is a particular strength noted in inspections of special schools and post-16 provision. A higher than average number of children and young people are involved in organised leisure activities outside of school. By most measures, the youth offending service works well and has good prospects for further improvement. Re-offending by young people is well below average. Almost all young offenders have a place to live which meets their needs and the number in education, training or work has improved significantly to above the average.

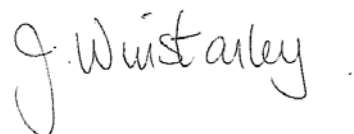
Children and young people get good support from the large majority of services to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get a job or study further. However, outcomes for care leavers deteriorated last year and are now worse than those seen nationally. The large majority of the county's sixth form schools are good, but the general further education college is only satisfactory. The number of 19-year-olds who gain qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs, or two A levels, is in line with the average for similar areas and improving at about the same rate. Educational outcomes for young people from low-income families are also improving, and the gap between them and the majority at the age of 19 is reducing year-on-year, compared to a much less positive picture nationally. The number of young people who are not in education, training or work is now closer to the average for similar areas, having fallen from a high point a year ago.

Prospects for improvement

Wiltshire's children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. The Children and Young People's Plan sets out clearly the shared vision and objectives of the local authority and its partners. Planning is rooted firmly in good consultation and effective involvement of children and young people; for example, through the Wiltshire Assembly of Youth, and with parents, carers and partner organisations. A multi-agency strategy to develop the children's workforce is well underway and the impact of excellent multi-agency work can be seen, for example, in the service for children with disabilities. In June 2010, following extensive analysis, children's services were reorganised and a new management structure put in place. The local authority is amalgamating some of the smaller primary schools to make the best use of its resources. There is a clear focus on closing the attainment gap between the majority of children and young people who do well and those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.

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