



Joint area review

Manchester children's services authority area

**Better
education
and care**

Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
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Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multidisciplinary team of 13 inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.
2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Manchester area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.
4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council; and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).
5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a seven-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:
 - a self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
 - a survey of children and young people
 - performance data
 - the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
 - planning documents
 - information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
 - the findings of the contemporaneous Youth Offending Team (YOT) inspection
 - briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.
6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in one neighbourhood in New East Manchester. It also included

gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Manchester lies at the centre of the Greater Manchester district in the north west of England. It is the sixth largest city in England and the third most deprived area in the country. More than a quarter of its people are aged from 0 to 19 years; 35% of these are from Black and minority ethnic groups and, within Manchester's schools, 150 languages are spoken. There is increasing ethnic diversity within the city. The average household income is very low and the number of people on income support is twice the national average. It has the lowest proportion of owner-occupied housing of any city outside London and the highest proportion living in council accommodation. Despite significant economic growth in the city centre and high investment in regeneration, half of the population lives in areas that are among the 10% most deprived in the country. Almost half of its school children receive free school meals; over half are born to a single parent and a substantial minority lives in lone-parent households. Almost half of the schools have a high proportion of pupils moving in or out during the school year. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is slightly above average.

8. There are 61 Labour councillors, 34 Liberal Democrats and one Green Party councillor. The main strategic partnership for children and young people is the Children and Young People's Partnership. The Manchester Children's Board, which has been in operation for two years, works alongside the Children and Young People's Partnership and provides senior executive leadership for children and young people's services. Its members are drawn from key partners, including the council, the Greater Manchester Police, three primary healthcare trusts and a representative from voluntary and community organisations.

9. Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council works closely with the council, colleges, training providers and schools in addressing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by two further education colleges, two sixth form colleges, three school sixth forms and 56 work-based training providers, nine of which are located within the Manchester boundary. Basic employment courses (Entry to Employment provision) are offered by three providers controlling over 1500 places. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the council.

10. Primary care for children in Manchester is provided by the North, Central and South Manchester Primary Care Trusts: these are due to be merged shortly into one. The Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust is the main provider of acute health services for children, which also provides services to Salford. Other children's hospital services and accident and emergency services are provided by the South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust, which also provides services to Trafford. Children's Mental Health Services are provided by both the Central Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust and the Bolton, Salford and Trafford mental health partnership. The trusts providing health services for the children of Manchester fall within the Greater Manchester Strategic Health Authority, which is planned to become part of the North West Strategic Health Authority.

11. There are no young offender institutions in the area. The deputy chief executive of the city council chairs the YOT management group.

12. The director of children's services is one of nine members of the council's strategic management team. The main services for children and young people are organised under a chief education officer and two assistant directors. The chief education officer has overall responsibility for the Manchester Education Partnership, which includes advisory and inspection services to schools, Excellence in Cities programmes, education otherwise than at school, attendance and special educational needs. An assistant director for children and families is responsible for looked after children, residential accommodation and family placement. Another assistant director for children and young people's services is responsible for early years, the youth service, extended schools and Children's Fund activities. The number of children looked after by the council is more than 1,400, of whom 122 are unaccompanied asylum seekers. There are 184 schools in Manchester: three nursery, 137 primary, 22 secondary, one academy and 18 special schools, including the Manchester Hospital School and Home Teaching Service, and three pupil referral units.

13. The Children and Young People's Partnership has established five task groups, each focused on one of the five outcomes for Every Child Matters, with representatives from a range of agencies providing support to children and young people.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

14. Outcomes for children and young people in Manchester are adequate overall and improving in general. Children and young people appear safe. The number of children and young people known to be missing has reduced significantly but remains high compared to other local authority areas. Children and young people are generally less healthy than nationally; in particular, there are very high rates of teenage pregnancy, babies with low birth weight and

perinatal and infant mortality. The number of looked after children is exceptionally high, but almost all have stable placements. Standards of attainment in schools are inadequate; they are improving at most stages of education but remain well below average. Many children and young people enjoy the wide range of learning and recreational activities available outside school. Schools provide good opportunities for pupils to take part in making decisions but, while there have been several formal consultations with them, the opportunities for young people to influence decisions and change services elsewhere are limited. The level of re-offending by young people is reducing but anti-social behaviour remains a concern. The proportion of young people continuing successfully in education and training beyond age 16 has risen and is just above average. Most young people live in suitable accommodation.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

15. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.** There are some good features. Targeted work has helped to reduce the number of young women smoking during pregnancy and increased the number of immunisations and mothers who are breastfeeding. However, all of these remain worse than nationally. There is good support for parents and carers, especially in areas with Sure Start programmes, and effective parenting courses. There are early signs that the Healthy Schools programme is having an impact. There is good emergency community dentistry and dental health promotion but parents report difficulty in registering with a local NHS dentist; a number of parents also reported difficulties in registering with local general practitioners. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provides good support to young people. The proportion of looked after children receiving health assessments is higher than previously, but it remains a problem particularly for those placed outside the city. Clinical provision for children and young people with mild and moderate LDD is satisfactory, but parents of children with severe needs do not think their requirements are met satisfactorily as a result of insufficiently joined-up working between agencies. A low proportion of young offenders referred to CAMHS take-up the service.

Staying safe

16. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** A higher-than-average proportion of children and young people surveyed as part of the joint area review said they feel safe both in and out of school. There is sufficient good-quality child protection training and appropriate procedures are in place. The tracking of missing children has improved, but the number known to be missing is still high. Social services' referral and duty services work well. However, the criteria for deciding when to refer children and young people for additional support are set at high levels and the published eligibility criteria are not clearly understood by all staff.

Professional staff are unclear about the threshold levels set for children with a disability and the council is rightly reviewing the safeguarding arrangements for these children. Agencies concerned with children and their safety work well together, but their effectiveness is inconsistent across the city. The quality of assessments in social care varies too much.

17. The number of looked after children is exceptionally high and attempts to reduce the numbers have so far had very limited success. The council has set a clear priority to lower the number and to improve outcomes for these young people through earlier intervention, but its budget strategy is based on a continuation of the high number, which conflicts with the increased investment in family support. There is a comprehensive and thorough system to review individual placements of looked after children. However, there is a reliance on hostel and bed-and-breakfast accommodation for a few older young people leaving care and older, unaccompanied asylum seekers. Some of these young people say they feel unsafe. The number of road traffic accidents involving children and young people is too high.

Enjoying and achieving

18. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** There is an extensive range of well-developed support for parents and carers to help their children succeed at school. The strategy for early years and childcare is sound and builds on existing Sure Start programmes. Standards of attainment are too low at most stages of children's and young people's education, despite the priority they are given by the council and its partners. The National Primary Strategy and an intensive support programme are improving the attainment of 11 year olds. The council recognises the weaknesses in the attainment of 14 year olds. There has been a steady improvement in the number of 16 year olds attaining five or more higher-grade GCSEs. The attainment of 11-year-old Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage pupils is above the average for the city, but, for Somali pupils, it is well below. The majority of 16-year-old Black and minority ethnic students attained levels at or above the city average in 2005. Looked after children do not make adequate progress throughout their schooling. The council has a good understanding of the weaknesses in the performance of individual schools and specific groups of children and young people. Schools' performance is affected significantly by the very high number of pupils who move between schools during the year.

19. Admissions to schools are managed adequately. The management of secondary school places is good but, despite action by the council and convincing plans for future reductions, there are currently too many surplus primary school places. Attendance at school is improving, but remains well below the national average. The attendance of pupils on complementary or alternative education programmes is not monitored sufficiently well. Good partnerships and funding by the council enable children and young people to

take part in a wide range of safe and accessible learning and recreational activities outside the normal school day.

20. A good range of well-targeted strategies is improving behaviour and preventing exclusions from schools that take part in these activities. However, schools have less confidence about the more general role and effectiveness of the behaviour support service. Improvements to this service have been hampered by lengthy delays to the review of the Manchester Education Partnership, of which it is part. An appropriate range of provision is available to provide full-time education for the majority of children and young people permanently excluded from school, but a minority are not placed quickly enough.

21. Support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate. The council has a well-thought-through strategy for including pupils with LDD in mainstream schools. However, the time taken to prepare the strategy has been long and the provision of the supporting funding arrangements is very slow. There are good systems for monitoring the attainment and progress of pupils with LDD. Support for the education of looked after children is inadequate. Despite considerable recent improvements, too few of these young people have personal education plans which are regularly monitored and reviewed. Too many children and young people have to wait too long for a place in school when they move into the city or between schools during the school year.

Making a positive contribution

22. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** Local partners provide services that promote children's and young people's self-esteem and confidence. A good range of planned opportunities for them to contribute to their community is available across the city, both in schools and through extracurricular activities. These help children and young people to develop socially and emotionally.

23. Several agencies provide mentoring support for children and young people who are having difficulties. Looked after children are provided with many opportunities to contribute to society and take part in community activities. The identification of young people at risk of offending is satisfactory. Joint work between agencies has contributed to a significant reduction in the number of looked after children being cautioned or convicted. Fewer young people are now re-offending. The number of looked after children involved in their reviews remains low, despite recent improvements. Support for some vulnerable groups is not coordinated well, for example, young carers receive a limited service with insufficient opportunities to receive help on a one-to-one basis.

24. Children and young people, including those with LDD, have been consulted on a range of issues by different services, but the impact of this has yet to be seen and the council's engagement strategy is not yet implemented fully. The Children's Rights Service does not have sufficient staff to support looked after

children in dealing with changes in their lives. Arrangements for the health, education and training needs of young offenders released from custody are not sufficiently robust. Too many young people say that they have limited influence on decision-making or changes to services outside schools.

Achieving economic well-being

25. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. There is convenient access to family support services for most parents and carers. Sufficient childcare is available to meet the needs of the diverse population. The strategies for supporting young people in preparing for working life, for reducing the number of young people not in education or training, and the number whose whereabouts is unknown, are adequate. Most Key Stage 4 pupils gain work experience and most schools offer an adequate range of courses. The planning and coordination of 14–19 education and training have improved recently through closer collaboration between the council, the local Learning and Skills Council, colleges and schools. However, relatively few pupils benefit from the increased range of programmes provided through links between schools and colleges. The implementation of a learning entitlement for all 14–19 year olds has been slow. There is insufficient provision of courses at level 2 and below. The numbers of young people in education and training after the age of 16, the success rates for 16–18 year olds and the numbers entering higher education have improved, although the level of improvement varies across the city. Regeneration projects offer training, work experience or job opportunities to local young people. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training has improved and is closer to the national average. The percentage of young people with LDD gaining qualifications or meeting their targets has increased consistently in recent years. The Connexions service provides effective guidance for young people with LDD and helps them progress to further training and employment. The council has adequate arrangements to provide temporary housing and supported accommodation for young people who need it, but some vulnerable young people stay too long in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and hostels.

Service management

26. The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is adequate. The Children's Board provides increasingly effective leadership for children's services. It recognises that, in some areas, the pace of improvement has been too slow. The council's and its partners' self-assessment is satisfactory. It includes generally accurate judgements and candid statements about many strengths and weaknesses, although there are some omissions, such as arrangements for children educated out of school. The degree of ambition shown by the council and its partners for children and young people is good, but the implementation of a joint workforce strategy is at an early stage, in common with many other councils. The council is spending more on children's services, demonstrating its

commitment to improving services. Improvements in the city are very evident and many young people are benefiting. There is a very clear awareness of what still needs to be done and the pace of change has increased significantly in recent months. However, the council's track record of improvement is mixed. Educational attainment remains very low and the process of reallocating funding to preventive services is at an early stage. The council prioritises its work adequately. The Children and Young People's Plan contains targets agreed between the government and Manchester Partnership, but does not include a budget strategy. There is no integrated strategy for commissioning services. There are adequate arrangements for managing performance. Senior councillors and members of scrutiny committees are knowledgeable and increasingly able to challenge officers about performance, but data is not always brought together to provide good information to service providers. Value for money is not evaluated sufficiently across all services.

Grades

Grades awarded:

4: excellent/outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	2		
Staying safe	2		
Enjoying and achieving	2		
Making a positive contribution	2		
Achieving economic well-being	2		
Service management	2		
Capacity to improve	2	2	
Children's services		2	
The education service		2	
The social care services for children		2	
The health service for children			2

Recommendations

For immediate action

The council and its partners should:

- improve information to parents and carers on what to do if they are unable to register with a local doctor or NHS dentist
- ensure the parents of children and young people with severe LDD receive coordinated support from agencies

- reduce further the number of children and young people known to be missing
- review the safeguarding arrangements for children with disabilities and ensure they receive an appropriate level of safeguarding
- reduce the time taken to find children and young people a suitable school place when they transfer during the year or move into the city
- raise the attainment levels of looked after children by:
 - ensuring they all receive health assessments
 - ensuring they all have a good-quality, up-to-date personal education plan
 - ensuring the Children's Rights Service is able to meet the needs of looked after children who require advocacy, advice and guidance.

For action over the next six months

The council and its partners should:

- ensure pupils excluded from school are placed speedily in other schools or alternative provision
- improve the quality of services for young carers
- ensure children and young people are able to influence decisions and changes to policy and services at a strategic level
- implement a learning entitlement for all 14–19 year olds.

For action in the longer term

The council and its partners should:

- reduce the health inequalities in different parts of the city
- reduce the number of looked after children
- improve attainment at all ages and particularly at age 14 (Key Stage 3)
- finalise arrangements for the joint commissioning of services for children and young people

- ensure services assess value for money routinely, particularly with reference to special educational needs and budget surpluses in schools
- coordinate the collection of performance information by all services and use it in the monitoring of those services
- ensure the Children and Young People's Plan contains an appropriate budget strategy, including a three-year forecast.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

27. Outcomes for children and young people in Manchester are adequate.

28. Children and young people are generally less healthy than nationally. There are considerable differences in levels of health across the city. There is a high level of teenage pregnancy, which is proving difficult to change, the proportion of expectant mothers who smoke is high, but reducing, the proportion of babies with low birth weight is significantly higher than the national average, but also reducing and perinatal and infant mortality rates are above average. The number of mothers breastfeeding is generally lower than the national average. Immunisations at second and fifth birthdays remain low. Emergency admissions to hospital for gastroenteritis, lower respiratory tract infections and asthma are significantly higher than the national average. The number of children with decayed, missing and filled teeth at ages five and 14 is significantly above the national average. The health of looked after children is improving.

29. Children and young people appear generally safe. Almost all children surveyed as part of this joint area review said they feel safe. This is better than the national average, but a high proportion of children and young people are involved in road accidents. Children and young people say that schools deal well with bullying. Appropriate checks are in place to determine the suitability of staff to work with children. The criteria for deciding when to refer children and young people to social services are high; agencies are not always clear about the level of concern at which children with disabilities should be referred to social services. The quality and rate of completion of assessments of children's needs varies too much. The number of looked after children is exceptionally high, but, all looked after children and child protection cases are assigned to a qualified social worker and individual cases are reviewed thoroughly. Almost all looked after children have a stable placement. Despite very significant improvements, there is a higher number of missing children than found in other local authority areas.

30. Children and young people do not achieve adequate standards.

Standards of attainment are increasing but are generally well below average. Nevertheless, a high proportion of children and young people surveyed see themselves as doing quite well or better at school, and many take part in an extensive range of recreational and out-of-school learning activities. The quality of childcare and early years provision is good overall, and most parents obtain a place for their children at schools of their first choice. Most schools perform at least satisfactorily: in 2004-2005, fewer schools were identified as having serious weaknesses or needing special measures than in previous years. Only one secondary school did not meet the minimum level of performance by pupils at GCSE required by the government. Attendance at school overall has improved, but remains well below national averages and unauthorised absence remains too high. Fewer pupils than in the rest of the country are permanently excluded from schools, but there are more fixed-term exclusions.

31. Attainment in 2005 was lower than in other similar areas and significantly lower than national averages. The trend of improvement for 11 year olds was maintained; increases in mathematics and science were better than the national average. At age 14, pupils underachieve consistently in English, mathematics and science. When compared with their attainment at age 11, 16 year olds made significantly less progress than might be expected. The achievement of higher-grade GCSEs is significantly below average; however, the rate of improvement since 2002 is significantly better than the national average. The attainment of 11-year-old Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage pupils is above the average for the city, but for Somali pupils it is well below. The majority of 16-year-old Black and minority ethnic students attained levels at or above the city average in 2005.

32. Looked after children do not make adequate progress throughout their schooling. At 16 years old, they perform significantly below the level of other young people; too many are not entered for GCSE examinations and they leave school without any qualifications. The attainment of children and young people permanently excluded from school is satisfactory. The attainment of children and young people with LDD in primary schools is improving, but in mainstream secondary schools it is less consistent. Within the youth service, young people's attainment is generally satisfactory, although the percentage of young people who use the service is well below average.

33. Children and young people have an adequate range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make an adequate contribution to their communities.

Good opportunities provided by services help them to develop socially and emotionally and increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. Mentoring support enables them to maintain positive relationships with their peers and others. Parents and carers attend a range of parenting classes and workshops to help them maintain positive relationships with their children. Young people with LDD are encouraged to participate in the planning of changes to their lives and there are good examples of how this is put into practice, particularly at

important transition points. Despite recent improvements, the number of looked after children who contribute to their statutory reviews is below the national average. Young people who leave care are well supported. However, some looked after children and young people do not feel able to deal positively with changes in their lives and the Children's Rights Service is not staffed adequately to provide the help they need. Children and young people are consulted on their views, although too many say that they have had limited influence on decision-making on things other than school matters. The numbers of young people with anti-social behaviour orders and dispersal orders remain too high. Activities are provided for children and young people who offend and there has been a reduction in the number of young people who re-offend. Arrangements for young offenders who are released from custody are not sufficiently robust to meet their health and educational needs.

34. Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared adequately for working life. Most Key Stage 4 pupils gain work experience and most schools offer vocational courses. Attainment at GCE advanced level is good and is above the national average. The achievement of Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in 2005 was below average. The achievement of Black and minority ethnic young people on work-based learning programmes was significantly low. The number of young people joining basic employment courses has risen and they achieve well above the national averages. Overall, the participation of 16–18 year olds in education and training has increased since 2003 by more than the national average and is now average. The numbers of young people who are not in education and training, and whose whereabouts after leaving school are unknown, have reduced.

35. The proportion of young people progressing to higher education is above the average for Greater Manchester. The proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment at age 19 has improved significantly since 2001 and is now average. The percentage of pupils with LDD gaining qualifications or achieving their personal targets has consistently increased. The Connexions service provides effective guidance for young people with LDD, which enables them to progress to further training and then to employment. Most young people live in decent homes, but some vulnerable young people are placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for too long.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

36. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate. There are some good features. There are variations in health outcomes across the city. The council is reducing these through, for example, Sure Start programmes and children's centres. In some of these areas, there has been a reduction in the number of young women smoking during pregnancy, a downward trend in babies with low birth weight,

and improvements in the number of mothers breastfeeding and in the number of immunisations. However, the pattern of improvement is not consistent across the city and poor health outcomes remain in many areas. A health inequalities action plan is in place, aimed at bringing further reductions in smoking and in alcohol consumption.

37. Maternity services are satisfactory. There is good, coordinated support for teenage parents, but teenage pregnancy rates remain high. Specialist teenage pregnancy midwives have good links with the Connexions service and Sure Start programmes. There is a designated midwife for young women involved in substance misuse and accommodation in self-contained flats is set aside for young mothers.

38. Parents and carers, especially those in Sure Start areas, receive well-coordinated advice and support to keep their children healthy through community health workers and health promotion activities. They are also guided well to relevant services. There are early signs that activities to reduce smoking by pregnant teenagers are having a positive effect. Parent and baby survival courses, aimed at helping parents to improve children's behaviour, are leading to significant improvements in children's behaviour and less depression among mothers.

39. An average proportion of children and young people reported feeling quite healthy or very healthy. There is a good range of appropriate information on health for young people. The Healthy Schools initiative is a good example of schools and health services working together; almost all schools are involved and 17 have achieved the highest standard. There are early indications this is helping pupils choose healthier ways of living, although there is as yet no systematic process for measuring the effects across the city. The youth service contributes to promoting health and provides counselling sessions that help improve young people's sense of self-worth and social skills. One notable project has resulted in young people producing health promotion information for others. The number of professionals trained to deliver sex and relationships education has increased and schools with the highest levels of teenage pregnancy are the focus of extra activities. Sexual health services have been redesigned and provide more consistent support across the city. The council and NHS are working together to reduce smoking rates. This is beginning to have an effect among the general population in parts of the city. Projects for different age groups have improved young people's knowledge, understanding and approaches to safety.

40. The council has commissioned a report on lifestyles to find out the extent of substance misuse among young people. At present there appears to be a low rate of use of class A drugs by young people, but a high level of alcohol misuse. There are young people who may be at risk because of parents who misuse drugs and alcohol. The Drugs and Alcohol team works well with the Healthy Schools programme, the Connexions service, Manchester Leisure Service and

the youth service to provide good preventive work in areas of highest need and to commission specialist treatment.

41. There is a good emergency community dentistry service and many good initiatives in the community to improve children's dental health. However, parents report difficulty in registering with a local NHS dentist. Similarly, some parents are unaware of what to do if they are unable to register with a local doctor. Accident and emergency provision is satisfactory. There is good provision for children and young people at St Mary's Hospital; this includes a primary care emergency centre and a walk-in centre and there are designated children's staff in each centre. Physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists work well together. However, there are long waiting lists for occupational therapy.

42. There is good support for the mental health of children and young people, which is appreciated by the young people themselves, parents, staff in special schools and other health workers. Health workers particularly value the training provided by CAMHS. CAMHS works well in partnership with other agencies and is meeting its targets. Specialist services provided out of hours are satisfactory. Good arrangements enable the YOT to easily refer young people to CAMHS, and a new post has been established to improve the use of services by young people from Black and minority ethnic groups. There are adequate arrangements for children and young people to transfer to adult care.

43. Health services for looked after children are adequate. The children value the support they get from a designated doctor, nurses and psychologist, each of whom has direct access to CAMHS. The council and its partners have adapted services to improve the health of looked after children, for example by providing immunisations at existing young people's drop-in centres and dental provision is good for these children. Training sessions for foster carers and residential workers are helping them deal with sex and relationships education which is needed to reduce the high rates of teenage pregnancy among looked after children. However, the proportion of looked after children receiving health assessments, although improving, remains low. There are plans to increase the number of health assessments, but the difficulties experienced by the council and its partners in obtaining a formal agreement with the PCTs in the areas in which children are placed means that arrangements for health assessments of the substantial number of children placed outside the city are less secure.

44. Services for children with LDD are adequate overall, but there are some important variations. There are individual examples of excellent joint agency support provided to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, parents of children with more severe needs have found health and other services to be unsatisfactory. In particular, information is not shared between services, leading to problems in getting effective support for these children. There is good provision for respite care, which parents appreciate. There are good arrangements in place to transfer children to adult services, including the 'My Health Book' which includes a health action plan. A

partnership of support services provides a good range of information and events for families with children and young people with LDD, but parents do not always have easy access to sufficient information.

Staying safe

45. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** A higher-than-average proportion of children and young people surveyed in this joint area review said they feel safe both in and out of school. The number of childhood accidents, particularly road accidents, is high. There are initiatives in place to tackle this, but these are relatively new and their overall effectiveness is not yet clear. Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place to ensure that dangers posed to pupils while on school trips or external events are assessed for risk so that appropriate action can be taken.

46. Child protection training is of good quality, provided on a regular basis and valued by staff. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place across children's services and individuals responsible for safeguarding have been clearly identified. There are now more effective measures in place for recruitment as a result of recent improvements to the checks carried out with the Criminal Records Bureau and of the continuity of employment for those applying to work in children's services. The quality of recording in case files is generally of an adequate standard, but varies considerably between teams of social workers.

47. Teachers provide good support to pupils who are bullied. There are early signs that initiatives to reduce domestic violence and its effects are leading to improvements. There are examples of effective networking between residential homes for looked after children to ensure safety and good links between the homes, the local community and police. The number of recorded complaints by looked after children is very low. However, there is not enough access to independent support and advocacy for looked after children, particularly for those fostered. In a few cases, children are left unsupported.

48. The social service's referral and duty system works well, as does the telephone contact centre system. However, callers in person at the council's offices can wait for lengthy periods before being seen. A well-designed risk analysis tool is used to decide which cases get priority, but its effectiveness is limited by a lack of published criteria for those who are eligible to access services. The completion rate and quality of assessments of need and planning are highly variable, as are assessment and action records for looked after children. There are high threshold levels for both family support and child protection services and while there are joint agency procedures for determining these levels, there is evidence to suggest that, occasionally, referrers exaggerate the level of risk to ensure access to services.

49. Agencies work well together at local level. This is leading to improved outcomes, for example fewer children being exploited sexually. However, this way of working is not consistent across the city and depends too much on individual contacts and relationships between staff. There are good examples of this joint working, such as the new Manchester Emergency Team panel, which is proving effective in supporting children and young people entering the care system, or whose placement has broken down. Housing services are represented on the Local Safeguarding Children Board and there is adequate joint working and support for homeless families.

50. The tracking of missing children has improved significantly. The issue is promoted well to the public and across agencies, but data systems are not yet aligned fully across all services. In individual cases examined by inspectors, prompt alerts were responded to quickly. However, there are still missing children and young people.

51. The number of looked after children in the city remains exceptionally high. Some focused work is being undertaken, both to prevent young people from becoming looked after and to bring to an end individual care orders. Too many looked after children remain on care orders, some for extended periods. There has been considerably increased investment in family support services in recent years. This has had a limited impact in reducing the numbers of particular groups of children being taken into care.

52. Looked after children's cases, including those placed out of the city, are reviewed efficiently and regularly, in line with statutory requirements. Inadequate practice is identified and dealt with effectively and paid carers are conscious of their responsibility to ensure safety. A few care leavers and asylum seekers have to rely on bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which leaves them feeling less safe.

53. Professional staff are unclear about the actual safety thresholds for children with a disability. The council is rightly reviewing the safeguarding arrangements for these children through the Local Manchester Safeguarding Children Board.

Enjoying and achieving

54. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** There are well-developed and extensive arrangements to provide support to parents and carers to help their children succeed at school. The strategy for early years and childcare is sound. A well-managed process has ensured there are sufficient places for three and four year olds across the city, particularly in those areas with the greatest disadvantage. The strategy builds creatively on existing Sure Start programmes. The rapid development of new children's centres is improving parents' and carers' access to specialist services. Monitoring, challenge and support to childcare providers to improve the quality of provision are good. Support for childminders before they are inspected has

been reviewed and early indications show that attendance at training and local networks is increasing as a result. The work of Foundation Stage consultants and Sure Start teams is well coordinated. Most children reach the expected standards in personal, social and emotional areas of learning, but fewer children do as well in communication, language, literacy and numeracy.

55. Standards remain too low at most stages of education, despite the priority given to raising standards by the council and its partners. They are well below national averages and below those in similar areas. The council is not complacent about this. Very challenging targets are set for all key stages of the National Curriculum, but these have been missed in successive years. The National Primary Strategy and an intensive support programme are improving the attainment of 11 year olds and the gap to the national average is narrowing. The council recognises the weaknesses in the attainment of 14 year olds and the need to improve the coordination of the work of the consultants supporting the Secondary National Strategy. There has been a steady improvement in the number of 16 year olds attaining five or more higher-grade GCSEs and since 2002 the improvement has been almost twice the national average. The Children and Young People's Plan correctly prioritises further improvements in attainment, particularly for 14 year olds.

56. The Manchester Education Partnership's school improvement service is promoting increased levels of collaboration between schools. The council has a good understanding of weaknesses in the performance of individual schools or specific groups of children and young people. Currently, the proportion of schools judged to be at least satisfactory in inspection is broadly average and slightly better than for similar areas. The performance of schools is affected significantly by the very high number of pupils transferring between schools, but the schools and council monitor this carefully. The support for schools is adequate. In primary schools, the intensified support programme is reducing the number of schools failing to reach the government's minimum targets. However, the council acknowledges the need to speed up the improvement in a small number of schools which lack the capacity to build on the progress they make. Successful interventions in underperforming secondary schools have raised overall levels of GCSE performance above the minimum required by the government in all but one school.

57. Despite determined action by the council, there are still too many surplus primary school places. The management of secondary school places is good and integrated well with the national initiative, Building Schools for the Future. Admission arrangements are managed adequately. A high proportion of parents receive their first preference of schools. However, too many children and young people have to wait too long for a school place when they move into the city or between schools during the school year.

58. Attendance at school is improving but remains well below the national average. The attendance service has been restructured. This, along with strategies such as the '100 days' full attendance challenge, truancy sweeps and

more use of fixed penalty notices, is beginning to bring about improvement. Nevertheless, the attendance of a small number of young people, particularly those on complementary or alternative education programmes, is not monitored well by schools or the council's services and, as a result, they are absent from schools for a prolonged period of time.

59. A good range of well-targeted strategies is improving behaviour and preventing exclusions in schools identified for additional support, for example through the Behaviour Improvement Programme. However, schools have generally less confidence in the effectiveness of the behaviour support service, whose quality is too variable. Improvements have been hampered by lengthy delays to the review of the Manchester Education Partnership of which it is part. There is an appropriate range of provision to provide full-time education for those children and young people who are permanently excluded from school. Good provision is made for children and young people unable to attend school for medical reasons. Support for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers is well integrated into the council's wider strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy, enabling the majority to continue their education in mainstream schools.

60. Good partnerships and funding by the council enable children and young people to access an extensive range of safe learning and recreational activities outside the normal school day. These include sports, outdoor education, music, theatre and cultural events. Many young people take part. In the case of music, for example, almost a quarter of children receive additional instrumental or vocal tuition, which is considerably higher than in other areas of the country. The youth service provides a satisfactory range of informal learning opportunities. Youth work is good.

61. Support for the education of looked after children is inadequate. Attendance at school is improving among this group of children. There is a useful range of extracurricular activities. Schools are monitoring the educational performance of looked after children effectively, but this is less secure for the large number educated outside the city. Challenging targets are set, but attainment remains too low. All schools have designated teachers for looked after children. However, despite considerable recent improvements, too few of these young people have personal education plans which are regularly monitored and reviewed. Currently, a small number of looked after children is permanently excluded from school. The range of alternative provision is insufficient to meet the needs of other looked after children not attending school regularly.

62. Support for children and young people with LDD is adequate. The council has a good strategy for including pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream schools. The number of children with LDD educated in mainstream schools is also increasing at a good rate. This accords with national policy and has the firm support of schools and other stakeholders who were consulted closely on its development. Good systems are in place to prepare the children and young people for the transfer from special schools into mainstream

schools and to monitor the impact of the transition on their attainment and progress. There are also good systems for monitoring the attainment and progress of pupils with learning LDD. The attainment of these pupils in primary schools is improving, but in mainstream secondary schools improvement is less consistent. The quality of statements of special educational need is good. The implementation of related statutory procedures has improved and is now satisfactory. However, too much time was taken to prepare the inclusion strategy and the delegation of funding to schools is still not completed. The council's disability action plan is being implemented appropriately in schools, but inconsistently in other settings, such as those used by the youth service.

Making a positive contribution

63. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** Children and young people are provided with a good range of opportunities to develop socially and emotionally, both through schools and the wide range of extracurricular activities available across the city. Schools are providing an increasing range of activities to enrich the curriculum. Local partners provide services that promote children and young people's self esteem and confidence. For example, the Blue Zone based at the City of Manchester Stadium and the Eden Project provide very good mentoring support to children and young people, including some who are experiencing difficulties and who may be at risk of exclusion. The Eden Project also offers a family service including home visits. There are good links with the local police community team and good partnership work with social services and Connexions.

64. Support for children and young people in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives is adequate. Support is good for children with LDD, but for other vulnerable groups it is more variable. There is good encouragement for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate in planning for changes in their lives, particularly when moving between schools. A group of young people with LDD has been involved in producing an interactive DVD to help others plan their post-school options. At Manchester College of Arts and Technology, an inspirational group of young people with learning difficulties produced a video on healthy eating which gained a prize in a national open competition and which was presented at an international conference. However, other vulnerable young people are not as well supported in managing change. For example, young carers are provided with limited opportunities to meet each other on a regular basis or receive one-to-one support and there is no strategy to identify their needs and provide effective support with their education.

65. Looked after children and young people are provided with many opportunities to undertake community activities. A good example is an exhibition of work on image and identity at Manchester City Art Gallery by a group of young people from residential care homes. This, along with regular events celebrating their achievements, has improved their self-esteem and

confidence. Together, the Placements, Leisure and Connexions services provide a good range of activities for young people in residential homes. These have helped to reduce significantly the number of looked after young people being cautioned or convicted for offences. Care leavers are well supported through the service provided by Barnardos and financial incentives encourage them to pursue further education. Elected members of the council have a good understanding of their corporate parenting roles and responsibilities. There are examples of councillors intervening effectively to improve provision for young people in their care. However, looked after children and young people do not always feel able to deal positively with changes in their lives and the Children's Rights Service is not adequately staffed to provide the help they need. Despite recent improvements, the numbers of young people who contribute to their statutory reviews is lower than the national average.

66. There is good consultation with children and young people in schools. Here they have an established voice in decision-making through school councils and there are many examples of how they have been able to introduce changes to school policy, for example introducing a reward system based on behaviour and attendance. The council has an engagement strategy but this is new and has yet to be implemented fully. Pupils from a special and mainstream school were consulted well about the integration of their two schools, contributing significantly to the design and decoration of the new building. Beyond schools, however, despite wide-ranging consultations, too many young people say they have limited influence on decision-making at a strategic level or on changes to services.

67. There is a satisfactory range of methods to identify children and young people at risk of anti-social behaviour. Partnership work is developing well between the youth inclusion projects, youth service, YOT and the police. A strategic prevention coordinator is to be appointed who will be located within the YOT. The YOT is represented on area casework panels across the city and makes and accepts referrals for work with children and young people and their parents/carers. Joint work by these agencies provides a range of activities to divert young people at risk of offending. For example, 200 young people at risk of anti-social behaviour were targeted for the Positive Activities for Young People programme. Fewer young people were involved in anti-social behaviour in 2005 than the previous year. However, the number of anti-social behaviour and dispersal orders remains high and youth nuisance continues to be a serious problem. Services for girls and for young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are not specifically tailored to meet their needs. The prevention and parenting team which has recently been formed within the YOT is relatively new and, as a result, preventive work is in its early stages.

68. There has been a reduction in re-offending after 12 and 24 months across the majority of sentences. The support and accommodation needs of young people released from custody are assessed promptly and their progress monitored. However, arrangements for the health, education and training of these young people are not sufficiently robust. Consultation with young people

has been identified by the YOT as a key area for development and work with victims is underdeveloped.

Achieving economic well-being

69. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.** The growth of children's centres, especially in more deprived areas, means there is convenient access for most parents and carers to a range of integrated services, such as family support and information on health, finance, education and employment. Several voluntary organisations also provide an adequate range of childcare and family support for more specific communities, such as new arrivals and asylum seekers. The provision of childcare is generally planned and monitored well and meets the needs of the diverse population. Many communities benefit from good family learning programmes and adequate courses in English for speakers of other languages.

70. The planning, coordination and development of 14–19 education and training have improved recently through closer collaboration between the council, the local Learning and Skills Council, colleges and schools. Joint working between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers has significantly improved and is now adequate. This has resulted in higher numbers in education and training, which are now in line with the Greater Manchester average. The proportion of young people engaged in full-time education is higher than the national average. The proportion in work-based training is very low. Of these young people in work-based training, the proportion from Black and minority ethnic communities is relatively high, but they achieve poorly. The achievement of those doing NVQs is rising, but not as quickly as nationally. The number of older young people whose whereabouts is unknown has reduced to the national average as a result of effective collaboration between the council, Connexions service and other partners. The number going on to higher education has increased significantly. However, these improvements are not uniform across the city. Key aspects of the 14–19 strategy have not been implemented quickly enough or monitored sufficiently well, in particular, the provision of pre-entry, level 1 and level 2 courses, and the establishment of a learning entitlement for all young people. The number of young people who are not in education, employment and training has reduced but remains too high.

71. Most Key Stage 4 pupils gain work experience and most schools offer an adequate choice of courses, including vocational subjects. The range of courses has been improved through better collaboration between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. However, a relatively small number of pupils benefits from the wider range of courses this has provided. Achievement in GCE advanced-level qualifications has improved and is above the national average. The rate of improvement since 2002 has been better than nationally. The achievement of those doing NVQs is broadly average. The range of courses

providing basic employment skills has increased in recent years, with the young people achieving well above the national averages.

72. Regeneration strategies are targeted well to improve opportunities for those living in the most deprived communities. Many offer training, work experience or job opportunities to local young people. A wide range of forums and activities is used to find out the views of the local community and the young people and involve them in the regeneration process, but some aspects of these arrangements are not developed sufficiently or applied consistently in different parts of the city. There are extensive plans to improve the availability of decent housing. The council has adequate arrangements to provide temporary housing and supported accommodation for young parents through partnerships with the social housing providers. The proportion of the care leavers who live in suitable accommodation has improved. Joint work between services, including a specialist social work team, provides good support to homeless families with children. However, some vulnerable young people stay in bed-and-breakfast and hostel accommodation too long.

73. The support for looked after children to achieve economic well-being is adequate. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training has improved towards the national average and their participation in work-based learning is similar to that of other young people in the city. The services' support for care leavers to progress to higher education is good. There is effective support from all relevant agencies to help looked after children or young people who have substance dependencies or are involved with the youth justice system.

74. The percentage of pupils with LDD gaining qualifications or achieving their personal targets has increased consistently in recent years. The quality of learning support offered by the education and training providers is at least satisfactory, with excellent support offered in two specialist high schools. Connexions provides effective guidance for young people with LDD, helping them progress to further training and then employment. These young people have a good level of involvement in discussions to help them transfer between education, health and social care services. Direct payments to the families and carers of these young people have increased. However, the process is not sufficiently flexible to meet the varying needs of some families.

Service management

75. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate.** The capacity to improve further is adequate. The level of ambition shown by the council and its partners for children and young people is good. The council demonstrates consistently effective leadership. It has been highly successful at a number of levels and improvements in the city are very evident; many young people are benefiting from this. The pace of development has improved significantly as a result of recent senior appointments in the last 12 to 18 months. However, the leadership of children's services has not previously

been as strong and important developments have been slow to happen. All partners are now committed fully to jointly agreed aims for young people, although a few relationships are still developing. The Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Children and Young People's Plan are entirely consistent in their ambition for young people to achieve their full potential. Children, young people and their parents were consulted in the creation of the Children and Young People's Plan.

76. The council's and its partners' track record of improvement over the last four years is mixed. For example, there have been improvements in some health outcomes, such as reducing smoking during pregnancy and the number of babies with low birth weight. However, educational attainment for 11 and 16 year olds has improved but remains too low. The number of looked after children remains exceptionally high.

77. The council prioritises its work adequately. There is a very clear awareness of what needs to be done. There are consistent links between the local area agreement, agreed with the government by the Manchester Education Partnership, and the targets in the Children and Young People's Plan. These targets are all based on good data and analysis of local needs. They reflect local and national priorities.

78. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver improved outcomes for young people is adequate. The Children's Board provides leadership at senior level and there is a healthy degree of challenge and realism about performance in its discussions. Its members recognise that in some areas the pace of change has been too slow. Councillors have a high level of understanding of the need for change and recognise there has not been sufficient improvement. All of the senior management positions in council services are now filled on a permanent basis, except in the Manchester Education Partnership, and leadership is recognised by staff and partners as being strong and supportive. Partnership working has improved significantly across the city in the last four years. The support of the primary care trusts remains strong, despite impending reorganisation in their sector. There are good examples of the council working with voluntary and community organisations to increase opportunities for young people, such as the Eden Project and Blue Zone. There is no integrated strategy for commissioning children's services, but pilots are underway to develop a framework for this. There are plans to move to district-based commissioning boards with pilots underway.

79. The council spends significantly more than the government grant on children's social services and plans further increases in each of the next three years. There is a clear commitment to increase the amount spent on family support and there are a number of strategies aimed at preventing children and young people being taken into care. Nevertheless, despite the priority given to preventive work, the current amount being spent on looked after children is exceeding the budget and costs are planned to rise further. Several budgets are

aligned effectively. Other sources of funding are due to end in the next few years and work is now underway to clarify what impact this will have on council finances. There are also deficits in local health service budgets. These issues are not identified in the Children and Young People's Plan.

80. Comparisons with a range of benchmarks show that value for money varies between services. Some projects to improve services have begun to have an impact only recently. For example, the council has increased its own residential provision to place more looked after children within the city and reduce costs. This has halted the increase in the number of children placed outside the city in the last 12 months. In contrast, the review of the Manchester Education Partnership has not yet been completed. Value for money is not assessed systematically. Poorly performing or overspending services are given particular attention but, for example, there is no clear assessment in relation to special educational needs, despite relatively high spending in this area. Similarly, health organisations do not consistently evaluate value for money. There is an adequate approach to managing school budgets. Schools with a deficit have to produce a balanced budget in the next year plus a recovery plan. Schools with surpluses are challenged about the amounts held, but there is no claw-back scheme if these are excessive.

81. The implementation of a joint workforce strategy is at an early stage, in common with many other councils. For example, interagency training is not planned for sufficiently. Social work vacancies, turnover rates and sickness absence have improved and there are no unallocated looked after children or child protection cases. There are sufficient legal staff to support care proceedings and adoption. There are shortages in council foster carers.

82. The council and its partners have adequate arrangements to manage their performance. Targets are monitored regularly. Senior councillors and members of scrutiny committees are knowledgeable and increasingly challenge providers about performance, for example when discussing a report on the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into mainstream schools. However, a considerable amount of data collected is not always brought together systematically to provide good information to service providers. Performance information for the Children and Young People's Plan is still recorded separately by the different services.

Annex: the children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multidisciplinary team of 13 inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.
2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Manchester area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.
4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council; and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a seven-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:
 - a self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
 - a survey of children and young people
 - performance data
 - the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
 - the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth offending team
 - planning documents
 - information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
 - evidence from the most recent annual performance assessment of the council's children's services and the most recent corporate assessment of the council

- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in one neighbourhood. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users and community representatives.

7. The council is performing adequately in area of children's services. The degree of ambition shown by the council and its partners for children and young people is good. All partners are committed fully to jointly agreed aims for young people, although a few relationships are still developing. The council's track record of improvement is mixed. There is a very clear awareness of what still needs to be done, but the pace of change, although increased significantly in the last 12-18 months, has been slow. There are adequate arrangements for managing performance. There are good examples of the council working with voluntary and community organisations to increase opportunities for young people but there is no integrated strategy for commissioning children's services. Value for money varies between services.

8. Overall, children and young people are generally less healthy than nationally. The council is helping to reduce variations in health outcomes across the city through Sure Start programmes and children's centres. The Healthy Schools initiative is a good example of schools and health services working together. There are good arrangements between CAMHS and the YOT to provide young offenders with support, but often the young people do not take up this support.

9. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Children and young people appear safe generally. A higher-than-average proportion of children and young people surveyed said they feel safe in and out of school. Agencies concerned with children and their safety work well together, but their effectiveness is inconsistent across the city. The number of looked after children is exceptionally high.

10. Council services provide adequate support to help children and young people enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve. Standards of attainment are too low at most stages of children's and young people's education, despite the priority given to it by the council and its partners. The council has a good understanding of the weaknesses in the performance of individual schools and specific groups of children and young people. Schools' performance is affected significantly by the very high number of pupils who move between schools during the year. Admissions to schools are managed

adequately. The management of secondary school places is good, but there are too many surplus primary school places. Attendance at school is improving but remains well below the national average. Support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate. Support for the education of looked after children is inadequate.

11. The work of council services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate. A good range of planned opportunities for them to contribute to their community is available. There is a satisfactory range of mechanisms to identify children and young people at risk of offending. Fewer young people are now re-offending. Children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have been consulted on a range of issues by different services, but the impact of this has still to be seen and the council's engagement strategy is not yet implemented fully.

12. Children and young people are provided with adequate support to achieve economic well-being. Children's centres provide convenient access for most parents and carers to a range of integrated services, such as family support and financial and employment information, especially in more deprived areas. A well-managed strategy for early years provision and childcare has ensured there are sufficient places for three and four year olds across the city, particularly in those areas with the greatest disadvantage. The planning and coordination of 14–19 education and training have improved recently through closer collaboration between the council, the local Learning and Skills Council, colleges and schools. However, relatively few pupils benefit from the increased range of programmes provided through links between schools and colleges. The numbers of young people in education and training after the age of 16, the success rates for 16–18 year olds and the number entering higher education have improved, although the level of improvement varies across the city.