

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services

Knowsley

Inspection dates 1 -12 February 2010
Reporting inspector Martin Ayres HMI

Age group: all

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About this inspection

1. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), one inspector from the Care Quality Commission and her assistant and two additional social care inspectors. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
2. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line managers, senior officers including the Executive Director of Children and Family Services who is also the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives.
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the children and young people's plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of two serious case reviews undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with 'Working Together To Safeguard Children', 2006.
 - a review of 39 case records for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making.
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, assessment and referral centres undertaken in July 2009.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

3. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements
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Service information

4. The Metropolitan District of Knowsley is one of five metropolitan districts on Merseyside with a population of approximately 150,800 people occupying 66,000 households. It comprises of the urban districts of Huyton, Kirkby and Halewood and the villages of Prescot, Whiston, Cronton, Stockbridge and Knowsley. Children and young people aged 0 to 19 years make up approximately 26% of the population (39,500). The population is predominately white British with less than two per cent from black and minority ethnic groups. Knowsley is the fifth most deprived borough in England with comparatively high levels of unemployment and poor health.

5. The Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) is one of five thematic partnerships within the Knowsley Strategic Partnership (KSP) and now operates as the Children's Trust. It is supported by the Children and Young People Executive (CYPE) which comprises of all relevant service providers, the independent and faith sectors, schools and children and young people. The CYPE is supported by the Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning Board consisting of relevant commissioning authorities and agencies in the district. Knowsley Safeguarding Children's Board (KSCB) sits within the wider strategic partnership but has a distinct identity and an independent voice on all safeguarding matters.

6. During 2009 arrangements within the council for dealing with incoming children's work, including children in need and safeguarding were strengthened and now comprises of a 'duty desk', three area-based specialist referral and assessment teams and three area-based specialist safeguarding teams. The team responsible for the common assessment framework (CAF) is co-located with the children's social care 'duty desk' system. Targeted Family Support is now delivered from each of three areas in a service that covers children aged 0 to 18. This aligns services to the council's area-based delivery model. Fieldwork services for looked after children and care leavers (a looked after children's team for children aged 0 to 13 and a young person's team for those aged 14 and above and care leavers) are delivered on a borough-wide basis as are services for children with disabilities. The local authority provides four, two-bedded residential units for looked after children and one short break establishment which also provides respite and outreach services for children and young people with a disability. The Fostering and Adoption service was re-configured in 2009 to form two specialist teams. The Young Carer's service is part of children's social care.

7. At the end of 2009, 306 children and young people were looked after compared to 307 at the end of 2008. Of this total, 214 were in foster placements. Eighty-eight per cent of the children and young people looked after

were placed in family settings (223 in foster or adoptive settings and 45 with parents). There are 153 children subject to child protection plans; 49 children are in receipt of overnight respite care packages and the CAF has been used to support 696 children and young people in Knowsley since 2006. Knowsley has 53 primary schools, seven special schools and seven Centres for Learning (replacing the previous 11 secondary schools) providing places to over 21,000 pupils. There is one pupil referral unit providing 74 places. In addition there are 15 children's centres that provide a wide range of children's services including health.

8. Commissioning and planning of child health services and primary care are carried out by NHS Knowsley, which is a partner in the Health and Wellbeing Commissioning Board and the 'associate' commissioner for acute services from a number of trusts, including St Helens and Knowsley, Liverpool Women's and Alder Hey, which is a specialist children's hospital but has paediatric accident and emergency (A&E) facilities. Only Alder Hey was considered within the scope of this review, as the other trusts will be included in the inspection of other areas.

9. NHS Knowsley acts as co-ordinating Primary Care Trust (PCT) for The National Mental Health Contract which includes the provision of child and adolescent health services. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are commissioned from the 5 Boroughs Partnership Trust. Community child health services are provided by Knowsley Integrated Provider Services (KIPS) whilst other community services, such as community dentistry and audiology, are provided to Knowsley by NHS Halton and St Helen, which were not included in this inspection.

The inspection outcomes: Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2 (Good)

10. The overall effectiveness of services to safeguard children and young people in Knowsley is good. The KSCB provides strong and visible leadership in establishing a consistent framework for safeguarding across the borough. There is a good history of partnership working to ensure safeguarding remains a priority for all agencies and professionals and levels of awareness of all safeguarding matters is good. Schools and Centres for Learning give good attention to the needs of all pupils to remain safe and include effective monitoring systems for absenteeism. Staff training is good and the joint workforce is well trained in safeguarding. Serious case reviews have been conducted to a good standard with careful attention given to the dissemination of findings and learning. Staff supervision and management oversight in all settings is good.

11. The outstanding analysis of need and the consequent understanding of communities in Knowsley have led to the provision of a good blend of universal and targeted services to safeguard vulnerable children and young people. Progress in addressing key aspects of inequality has been successful with clear evidence that the gap between Knowsley and national performance on a range of key indicators has narrowed. The numbers of initial and core assessments undertaken have increased since the duty and assessment services were re-structured. The quality of work is at least adequate and often good and self-auditing processes are robust and accurate. There has been some turbulence in the duty and assessment services during re-structuring caused by some staffing and workforce issues which have been effectively addressed. Current levels of initial and core assessments are in line with regional and comparator averages. Motivation within these teams is positive and leadership and management oversight is good. The quality of recording and case analysis is adequate and being strengthened through the use and ongoing development of a flexible electronic recording system.

12. There are good and outstanding examples of projects and services in the borough to prevent children and young people from being harmed and to ensure they feel safe and protected. For example, the work undertaken in schools, through close collaboration with the police and voluntary sector, and in raising community awareness in respect of risk. The work of the child death overview panel is also outstanding in this respect. Lessons from national enquires and serious case reviews are disseminated well and shared across the partnership leading to service adjustments as necessary. There is good awareness of specific concerns relating to child trafficking, sexual exploitation and bullying.

13. User involvement in strategic service planning is good but less well developed at operational levels. Complaints systems are established but their availability is not consistently well understood. There is evidence that users are widely consulted on their plans but this is not routinely recorded in case records. Family details, including ethnicity are well recorded. All cases are suitably allocated, there are no waiting lists and responsiveness to incoming referrals is good. Capacity within safeguarding teams is adequate and work is being managed within existing staff resources. However, staff are stretched at times by the fluctuating demands of court work and other longer-term demands.

Capacity for improvement

Grade: 1 (Outstanding)

14. Capacity for improvement is outstanding. Knowsley has an excellent track record of responding positively to the needs of its communities and finding the resources to underpin effective joint working. Considerable progress has been made in developing partnership working and establishing a wide range of integrated services. Service commissioning is effective and closely linked to outstanding needs analysis and good performance management. There is an ongoing drive to achieve greater levels of service commissioning underpinned by systems to monitor contract compliance and to evaluate and assure good outcomes for service users.

15. Considerable progress is being made, in a most challenging and demanding area, to reduce inequality and to ensure all children and young people are and feel safe. The area has been very successful in obtaining external funding as a result of its comprehensive needs analysis, good project design, robust management and political scrutiny. Partnership working and value for money are outstanding and offer considerable scope for continued capacity growth. Workforce development is robust and responsive to changing needs and demands.

16. The area is very self-aware and with robust political and senior management leadership has maintained a trend of improvement across the whole of safeguarding. Where necessary, managers have taken clear and decisive action to deal with poor performance and staffing issues. The KSCB, Children's Trust and local partnerships provide highly visible leadership on all safeguarding matters and work closely with other bodies within Merseyside. Knowsley is engaged in a number of thematic schemes relating to the eradication of poverty, achieving reduction in youth offending and the development of extended schools provision for which the borough has acquired national interest and government support.

Areas for improvement

17. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Knowsley the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately:

- There are no recommendations for immediate action.

Within three months:

- Ensure managers and staff are suitably trained in customer care in safeguarding and welfare issues so that they welcome and respond positively to representations and complaints, as and when they occur.
- Improve the level and recording of case analysis and user views and ensure managers oversee the quality before they are signed off.

Within six months:

- Review and evaluate the range of work undertaken by safeguarding team social workers and specifically the impact of court work on team flexibility and responsiveness.
- NHS Knowsley should ensure that all GP practices receive appropriate training in safeguarding and child protection and that this is routinely audited in respect of learning and professional supervision arrangements. This should be reported to and monitored by the KSCB.

Outcomes for children and young people**The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe. Grade: 2 (Good)**

18. The effectiveness of services to ensure that children and young people are safe is good. The KSCB provides strong and visible leadership across all services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children across the partnership. This is evidenced through the KSCB taking a lead role in contributing to the development of services, by strengthening the domestic abuse strategy to improve its impact on children affected by domestic abuse, effectively developing child death overview work and driving safer workforce developments. KSCB ensures audits for agencies, including all schools, are carried out on an annual basis, so that agencies can demonstrate they are meeting all safeguarding requirements and take any appropriate action to address shortcomings. This audit process is also applied consistently to all commissioned services. KSCB has developed a system of multi-agency audits of practice conducted on an annual basis with evidence this is strengthening joint practice. KSCB is active in identifying any weaknesses in procedures or processes to safeguard children and has a good record of action. An example of this was a case scrutinised by the Serious Incident Review Group (SIRG), where opportunities to undertake a Common Assessment were identified. This led to increased priority being given to the renewed roll-out of CAF, additional staffing

resources, revised policies and procedures, training and the introduction of a scrutiny process, all of which were funded from additional investment.

19. Ensuring children are safe through good information-sharing, and accurate assessments of risk of harm, are strong features across the partnership, evidenced through the work of the multi-agency risk assessment arrangements for domestic abuse and hate crime (MARAC), multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), and the multi-agency gun crime group. These partnerships have enabled good joint planning to keep children safe at strategic and individual case levels. Multi-agency action, led by the police and taken in response to the dangers presented by gangs and gun crime, has made a significant difference in helping to keep children within affected families and the wider communities safe. There is continued and sustained vigilance and action within the partnership to combat this challenging problem. A&E monitoring arrangements in respect of children and young people who may be at risk of harm are robust and staff report confidence in the systems being used. Flagging arrangements in 'walk in' centres is adequate.

20. The 'Safe Havens' work is a highly effective multi-disciplinary model of work to protect the most vulnerable children and young people, with a highly committed, multi-agency outreach approach, and good follow-up support for the young person and their family. This targeted approach at key times of the year or for specific events has had significant impact on reducing risk. It has facilitated ongoing contact with vulnerable children and young people for example, the direct work that is being undertaken with a group of 15 girls identified as being at additional risk of harm on drinking and personal safeguarding issues. This is highly successful preventative work which has enabled alcohol issues to be identified and addressed at an early stage before major crises. This model of proactive outreach approach is mirrored in other work, for example, targeted youth support and anti-social behaviour. There are similar processes in place covering self-harm and substance misuse.

21. The safety of school pupils is addressed well, with a 'Safer Schools' police officer in place at each centre of learning, good action to involve pupils in work on anti-bullying and anti-racism, and some preventative work on domestic abuse. KSCB has led effectively on the annual Safer Internet Day, which took place during the inspection. The young advisers' group and other young people were involved in the planning and delivery of activities, which were taken into schools and enabled pupils to engage meaningfully with a safeguarding issue which affects them directly. Community events were also held in public areas such as supermarkets, to educate parents and carers in how to keep their children safe when using the internet. The THINK clinic is a well constructed approach to open access to health services for young people. This includes sexual health and other health concerns which may also impact on their safeguarding. Training for health professionals is in place and in line with national guidance. Specific training for GPs, although slower to get off the ground, is now in line with similar areas and adequate.

22. The assessment undertaken for the refreshed Children and Young People's Plan 2009-11 provides an excellent and detailed picture of the needs of children and young people in Knowsley. It is being used well to support the commissioning and de-commissioning of services in order to meet need. The council and its partners have a clear focus on the impact of child poverty and are constantly reviewing jointly provided services in order to maximise their impact on safeguarding. This approach is constantly being reinforced through needs analysis and targeting on key issues arising in the communities. Support is well-targeted on groups of children and young people with additional needs, such as young carers, missing children, children at risk of exclusion, and young people who are on the fringe of gang activity. Safeguarding arrangements in children's homes are met well and this aspect has been graded as good in children's homes inspections in the borough.

The effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people feel safe. Grade: 2 (Good)

23. The KSCB and wider partnership provide a wide range of carefully targeted initiatives to ensure children feel safe. These include some very strong and effective work in respect of strategies to promote good behaviour in education settings and well planned work between the police and schools to highlight specific risks and to prevent the escalation of problems. Good examples of this work include the Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (SEAL) and the Experiential Learning (EXE) programme which ensure children and young people feel safe and know what to do in the event of individual or collective concerns. All recent Ofsted school inspections have judged learners' behaviour in schools as good or better and surveys conducted as part of this inspection and by the Knowsley partnership consistently show that children feel safe. The police and 'Safer Schools' officers are making an effective contribution to reducing anti-social behaviour through restorative justice practices and specific initiatives such as 'be safe knife awareness' and careful attention is being paid within these schemes to children and young people feeling safe in their local communities. Health related questionnaires indicate that Knowsley residents generally feel safe in their own homes and communities and are supportive of the roles played by agencies to strengthen community cohesion.

The quality of provision Grade: 2 (Good)

24. The quality of safeguarding provision is good. Partnership working at an operational level is also good, and is being strengthened through the recent move to area-based working. Council services, such as the school inclusion service and the Children's centres, are already working closely with social care teams on an area based model to good effect. The social care teams are establishing good working relationships with other professionals working with children in the locality such as health visitors, police and centres for learning. Maternity services confirmed that inter-agency working is good and monitoring and effective auditing processes are in place in all sites.

25. Inspectors identified productive relationships in joint assessment practice and in case recording. Partnership working with the police Vulnerable Persons' Unit (VPU) is well-established, but there are some delays noted in holding some strategy meetings due to resource constraints on the VPU. Effective multi-agency working is firmly embedded, with good outcomes evident in a range of areas, including teenage pregnancy, young carers, and school exclusions.

26. Reduction of domestic abuse is a high priority in the borough and there is a well co-ordinated, multi-agency response, with clear referral pathways, and a good range of service provision. Improved identification of children who are affected by domestic abuse has led to an increased number of children subject to a child protection plan under the category of emotional abuse, enabling them to be better protected and their needs to be met. Domestic abuse is better identified through risk assessments completed by police officers called to incidents, with higher risk cases notified to MARAC. The MARAC is working very effectively, with representatives co-ordinating responses from their own agencies. This is ensuring that combined MARAC activity continues to add value to existing planning arrangements. These arrangements have been highly successful in reducing the rate of repeat victims, from 36% in 2008/09 to 10% in the most recent quarter for a rolling year. A range of services with knowledge of the impact of domestic abuse are in place, including specialist health personnel, learning mentors to support children, 'Teen Talk', which provides group support for young people, and the Freedom Programme for adult victims of abuse delivered by Knowsley Domestic Violence Support Services (KDVSS). The 'Changing Places' programme, delivered through the Youth Offender Service provides a focused service for young people who are potential or actual perpetrators of abuse and the InPACT programme is targeted on adult perpetrators. The partnership has identified the need to further develop specialist support for children affected by domestic abuse, and a lack of individual support for adult victims who may not be ready for a group work approach.

27. Thresholds for access to social care services are clearly defined although some professionals reported that in practice there were variations in interpretation leading to some inappropriate referrals to social care. This aspect is kept under close scrutiny by the KSCB and is being actively addressed through promoting the consultative role of the duty service, and by co-locating the CAF co-ordinator with the duty service to respond to professionals concerned about children and families with a lower level of need. Early intervention with children, young people and families through the CAF is not yet fully embedded in practice across agencies. However, this area of work has received increased priority and resources, and is in a good position to improve its impact further. There are some examples of services using the CAF well to improve the co-ordination of support to children and their families, including 'Safe Havens', and the School Inclusion Service.

28. An unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services in July 2009 identified one priority area for action, some areas for development, and some strengths. The priority area for action related to incomplete initial assessments. At the time of the unannounced inspection, plans were already in place to realign and strengthen the duty and assessment teams and these have subsequently been realised in a well-co-ordinated and sustainable way. There has been an increase in staff resources and a continuing programme of focused skill development. Current assessments are well tracked, signed off by team managers and monitored for quality. Good progress has been made in most areas of the action plan and the outstanding areas for development have been prioritised for further attention.

29. The numbers of initial and core assessments increased significantly during 2008-2009, but the timeliness of initial and core assessments was adversely affected during the period of transition to new duty and assessment arrangements. However, the most recent data on timeliness shows that performance is in line with statistical neighbours and other local authorities within Merseyside and the trend is improving. As the realignment of duty and assessment services has only been finalised recently, the full impact is not yet evident. The duty point which receives all new contacts and referrals benefits from good systems and rigorous management overview which enables prompt decision-making, and a smooth handover of cases to the relevant assessment team. Observation of the three assessment teams showed them to be working effectively, and they are well-positioned to complete assessments in a timely way. All cases are appropriately allocated to suitably qualified staff, supervision is good and action to investigate concerns is prompt and timely. The realignment into functional teams is also enabling appropriate development of specialist expertise to meet children's needs in different situations. However, responsibilities in the safeguarding teams frequently involves longer-term work such as the preparation and presentation of court reports. Although these demands were being managed at the time of the inspection there is potential for staff to feel over-stretched.

30. Assessments and plans are at least adequate and often good. Assessments are timely, and involve other professionals appropriately. The views of children and their families are generally taken into account. There is good assessment of risk, with appropriate reassessment, but the level and quality of analysis in initial and core assessments is variable. Plans on audited cases are clear, but some focus on process or outcomes which are too broad and do not sufficiently specify clear, measurable and timed objectives. Cases are appropriately reviewed, through child protection conferences or child in need meetings, and core group working and network meetings are well embedded in practice. Management oversight of front line practice is good, and supervision records are evidenced on files. Joint working between the police and social care services in undertaking joint investigations into allegations of child abuse are good. There is a secure transfer of cases between teams. Plans to co-locate teams and the current effective arrangements for information-sharing and personalised handover with families also assist case transfer

arrangements. The protocol electronic recording system is very accessible, requires appropriate management overview, and provides clear access to key documents. However, it demands a high level of staff time and will benefit from the use of new flexibilities to introduce simplified processes. Planning arrangements for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are still in the early stages of development, and are not yet meeting parents' need for support. However, new person-centred planning arrangements are valued by schools.

31. There is a very good range of services providing support to meet the diverse and complex needs of children, young people and their families. This is through the provision of direct work and includes services provided through family centres, the portage service, targeted youth support and the family intervention projects. The children's centres are undertaking some excellent, well-targeted work with young children and their families, both within the centres, and on an outreach basis. Extended school services are providing effective support, not only for children but for parents, and services are also focused on major issues such as reduction of poverty. Family centres carry out a range of effective interventions with families with complex needs, and work in close co-ordination with the social care teams. Staff in children's centres sometimes assume the lead professional role in less complex child in need cases which require direct work, with the transferring social work team manager and the respective family support team manager maintaining a regular link to maintain an oversight of the work, including where levels of concern change. Closure of involvement can only be completed with the agreement of both managers and this provides additional and good planning security.

32. The complaints procedure, although up to date, is not sufficiently well understood by staff and users as a means to routinely obtain feedback on services provided and there has been a lack of recent training for front line managers in children's social care. Procedures for allegations against professionals are in place, with lead responsibilities identified but this area of work would benefit from increased staff training and awareness-raising across partner agencies and community groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2 (Good)

33. Knowsley has made a long and sustained commitment to children's services in a highly challenging area. The outstanding ambition shown by the lead member for children's services and other elected members of the council is underpinned by the judicious allocation of resources and good processes for the measurement of service quality and performance. Strategic leadership and management is outstanding and demonstrates a considerable vision and innovation to tackle comparably high levels of need and deprivation in the borough and developing services from the basis of intelligence about the communities served by the partnership. There is considerable evidence of impact of services in raising aspiration and in responding to specific issues affecting the quality of lives of children and families. The robust leadership and

management approaches have ensured clear strategic direction over time, the building of capacity to respond to need and the formation of appropriate planning structures and systems to safeguard children and young people.

34. The KSCB provides good leadership on all safeguarding matters, is well chaired and organised and is able to exercise independence in challenging all partners and agencies in the promotion of effective services. Local strategic partnerships operate well to co-ordinate services, to measure and monitor performance and to respond to identified needs in the localities. In these respects the partnerships have been functioning well as forms of the Children's Trust and the development of the Trust as a single entity from April 2010 is well advanced. Sub-groups of the KSCB operate effectively to update safeguarding procedures, to undertake serious case reviews and to monitor and audit performance. Training provided by the board is accessible and highly regarded across the partnership. A Child Death Overview Panel is fully operational and provides an outstanding model for sensitively responding to and learning from the cases involved. This panel is well represented across the partnership, draws on local and national perspectives on child deaths and is leading to informed decisions in respect of child safety, (including in the home and road traffic safety and management), and all aspects of safeguarding. Communication between the panel and the KSCB is effective.

35. An outstanding model for assessing need has been developed to provide detailed information in respect of population trends and all aspects of children's lives relating to *Every Child Matters* outcomes. The level of information derived is at post-code level which enables the partnership to effectively target services and respond quickly to emerging areas of concern. A particularly imaginative approach involves a scorecard of a cohort of 100 'fictional babies'. This enables the partnership to create scenarios demonstrating the impact of services in different parts of the borough if performance remains at current levels. Through this approach the partnership can commission and target new services to improve outcomes or decommission those services which are no longer sufficiently effective. Prioritisation is suitably informed by the intelligence derived from needs analysis and is good.

36. Performance management and quality assurance at a team and case level is adequate and systems are now in place to monitor and audit the quality of work and outcomes. This has been aided by the implementation of a flexible computerised recording system which facilitates oversight by managers. Aspects of the system remain under review and development and there is good support from information staff in understanding the day to day needs of safeguarding services. Case recording was mainly up to date with no unallocated work. Responsiveness to referrals, including high levels of domestic violence is good. The local authority was asked to audit the selection of cases examined by inspectors prior to fieldwork. The quality of the audits was good, transparent and substantially accorded with the views of inspectors in terms of quality and impact of services. Performance management within health services is good. Several monitoring systems are in place including to named and

designated post appraisals. Designated staff attend board meetings and this provides a good opportunity to link health operational matters with strategic developments. Records of meetings relating to health staff performance are adequate. Some health staff felt they could be improved with a clearer definition of aims and objectives. Key joint health and local authority appointments have been made at senior management levels and are facilitating effective and appropriate levels of challenge with elected members. Regular clinical audits are in place, which are used by commissioners to strengthen children's services.

37. Joint workforce planning is responsive to local and changing needs with a good emphasis on training, development and personal performance. Recruitment processes are robust with Criminal Record Bureau checks undertaken in accordance with national vetting and barring guidance. The leadership of this important aspect of joint service provision is good. Staff in all agencies benefit from training opportunities and access is good. Supervision of health professionals is good with increased frequency when individual management reviews for use within serious case reviews are being prepared. Information dissemination across the whole partnership on learning from serious case reviews is also good.

38. The council and partners have placed a significant emphasis on effective user engagement in the planning and delivery of services in the borough. This is based on a thorough understanding of the demands of local communities in respect of safeguarding and child protection. There is increasing involvement of users in strategic planning processes and scrutiny which for children's services are well managed, focused and effective. Local services, including children's centres and schools are also building arrangements to gain the views of users and to act accordingly. The engagement of users at an individual case level is less well developed and processes for representations and complaints are not consistently well understood. Staff reported discussions with children and families about the services they receive and in all cases there was good evidence of children being seen alone. However, the outcome of these contacts is not consistently recorded and there is not a clear link between such contacts and the formulation of individual plans which reflect user participation in their construction and service delivery.

39. Partnership working is outstanding. This stems from the manifest commitment of all agencies to safeguarding and gaining a good understanding of need in an area of significant deprivation. Participation of partners in strategic planning processes is good with coherent joint strategies in place including an updated children and young persons' plan. Partnership working is reflected well in the 'ownership' of safeguarding in Knowsley as a joint enterprise and in the establishment of services to prevent harm and diminish the impact of abuse. The police demonstrate a good commitment to safeguarding, child death overview arrangements, and diversion from crime and in the tracking of adults who may pose a threat to children. However, the capacity of the police to respond immediately in some situations is hampered by

other duties and reduced capacity. The voluntary sector also plays an important role in the provision of over 400 services to children and families. Voluntary organisations have service level agreements with clear targets for action against which impact and value for money are routinely evaluated. This sector is responsive to local and individual needs and has an active place on strategic planning boards and committees. The partnership has established clear processes for commissioning and monitoring services, including out of borough provision and has achieved this effectively. The partnership is moving incrementally to greater levels of service commissioning, linked to the role of the Children's Trust and maintains robust approaches to de-commissioning where performance expectations or outcomes are not being realised. There are many examples of integrated services aimed at specific groups and localities. Senior joint health and social care management posts exist to lead partnership working and budgets and staffing have been suitably aligned to increase capacity and value for money.

40. The commitment to equality and inclusion is good and is narrowing the performance gap on a wide range of indicators and at a faster rate than found nationally and in statistical neighbours. This includes significant progress in challenging areas such as the level of teenage conceptions and aspects of healthy eating. The council achieved Level 3 in the Equality Standard before the performance measure changed and is currently working towards the achievement of 'excellent' under this new system by 2012. Overall a very comprehensive range of activities are being undertaken in the borough to tackle inequality with a thematic approach to reduce poverty which has acquired national interest. The partnership has been effective in securing substantial and additional funding through participation in national pilot projects and schemes. An excellent example is £150 million funding obtained from the Building Schools for the Future programme which has produced seven new and high quality Centres for Learning in the borough. These offer outstanding extended school services in the context of safeguarding and meeting the needs of local children and young people.

41. The MARAC focusing on hate crime has made good progress and had a significant impact for families and children who have been subjected to racism. Good analysis of local data and intelligence is ensuring activities are being effectively targeted. Similarly, the 'Kick Racism Out' project is having a good impact and is well targeted in the context of work in schools in conjunction with the police and other key partners. Practice in schools, and increasingly in private and voluntary settings, is developing well to tackle aspects of equality and discrimination and this is monitored very effectively through local inspection arrangements. Joint work in respect of 'Aiming High' and addressing the needs of children with disabilities has been slower, although this is an area of provision where partners are actively adjusting priorities.

42. The achievement of value for money is outstanding. The partnership has adopted a robust approach to commissioning and de-commissioning based on the assessment of need, outcomes and service cost. Scrutiny of services by

members and senior officers, in conjunction with users is strong. An innovative senior management style has ensured appropriate and quick responses to national initiatives and to securing substantial new funding for the area. This additional resource has helped in securing a real difference in narrowing equality gaps. Resources are deployed with attention to impact and outcomes and from the basis of the outstanding understanding of local need. The partnership uses risk assessment models well in order to predict future demands and issues and has maintained a flexible approach to workforce development to capitalise on the potential of joint working and service integration.

The inspection outcomes: services for looked after children

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2 (Good)

43. The overall effectiveness of services to support looked after children and young people in Knowsley is good. Political and managerial leadership is visible and strong and ensures that high priority is given to meeting the needs of this group. Partners have ensured, through effective planning arrangements, that looked after children and young people have the opportunities and resources to make a good start in life and receive ongoing support when they leave care. Corporate parenting responsibilities are taken very seriously and renewed through constant evaluation of progress against agreed targets. The engagement of looked after children and young people in strategic planning and scrutiny processes is outstanding and ensures the views of this group are well represented at this level. Considerable efforts are made at an individual level to ascertain the wishes and feelings of looked after children and young people. However, case recording does not consistently capture these or describe how they have been acted upon. Workforce planning is good with high levels of satisfaction reported in respect of training programmes and opportunities.

44. Performance management is good and based on a sound knowledge of the looked after children population in the borough and the increasingly effective impact of key services in supporting healthy lifestyles, improving educational attainment, reducing offending rates and supporting further education, training and employment. Progress in reducing the gaps in achievement between looked after children and young people and the general population have been good. Outcomes against all key indicators show good performance, not only against comparable areas but also in the context of Merseyside as a whole, and nationally. Educational achievement, through targeted and very well planned services, is a particular success. Children and young people who are looked after are kept safe and the leadership of the KSCB in this respect is good. Surveys undertaken by the partnership and during

this inspection indicate that children and young people in the care system feel safe and know who to go to in the event of any safeguarding concerns.

45. Good work is undertaken to monitor school attendance, children who go missing from care and those that have been bullied. There is good police involvement in strategies to reduce criminality with appropriate engagement with this group through schools and other community ventures. Health support to looked after children and young people in the borough is good with visible leadership by key health professionals in raising awareness of need and developing integrated services such as the team around the child and targeting additional needs. Good progress is being made to develop health outreach services in schools, community groups and in places visited by children and young people. This is showing good impact in respect of sexual health, access to emotional support, immunisation rates and in general health promotion and lifestyles. Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is good. There are no waiting lists and services are responsive to need including children and young people who are looked after outside the borough.

Capacity for improvement

Grade: 1 (Outstanding)

46. The partnership has outstanding capacity for improvement. Corporate parenting responsibilities are fulfilled and there is a sustained track record of commitment and improvement. The analysis of need in the borough is outstanding leading to an effective approach to management and service delivery. Targets and plans are kept under close scrutiny with conscientious political and managerial oversight. All services for looked after children and young people are appropriately monitored and scrutinised and afforded priority attention by KSCB and local strategic planning groups. The borough includes children and young people who are looked after and placed by other local authorities in the area in all service provision and takes this level of responsibility very seriously.

47. There is an outstanding track record of continuous improvement against key targets, including educational attainment, health and offending. Although Knowsley has high levels of deprivation looked after children and young people are making good progress. Aspiration levels are high and are now reflected in comparative performance data. There is good awareness across the partnership of the areas for further improvement, including case recording of user views, and resources are suitably deployed to underpin improvements. A tight management approach is applied to service commissioning and de-commissioning in the context of good value for money, service impact and improved outcomes.

Areas for improvement

48. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for looked after children and care leavers in Knowsley the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Immediately:

- There are no recommendations for immediate action.

Within three months:

- Strengthen processes for recording personal education plans and pathway plans to ensure these are suitably linked to all other aspects of planning for individual looked after children and young people.

Within six months:

- Ensure that the views of looked after children and young people are fully recorded in case records and that Independent Reviewing Officers and managers ensure appropriate action is taken in respect of these views, including access to representation and complaints processes.
- Include in training programmes the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer in monitoring complaints.

Outcomes for children and young people

49. Outstanding attention is paid to the health needs of looked after children and young people. Ninety-five per cent receive an annual health assessment which is significantly above similar areas and most performance indicators for the health of looked after children exceed those of the general child population in Knowsley. Performance in dental hygiene has improved from a comparatively low base and there is clear evidence that current strategies are having a good impact on improving oral hygiene. Good initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles have been developed with appropriate involvement of looked after children and young people who are well supported to establish healthy lifestyles. Looked after children have access to the full range of health services from a dedicated looked after children health team. CAMHS are available on demand, and these services are resourced to offer an equal service to those children placed out of borough, and to looked after children from other authorities who are placed in Knowsley. This is outstanding. The borough is engaged in targeted and carefully programmed schemes to reduce teenage conception rates and to promote sexual awareness and health. The provision of health services within schools and Centres for learning is integral to this approach and is showing good impact. The incidence of teenage conceptions is declining from a comparatively high base and is now in line or below similar areas. The health of looked after children is covered comprehensively in multi-agency training programmes for all staff and is a key factor in the formulation of individual plans. Training in health programmes is provided to foster carers and there is an annual event to raise the profile of key issues such as substance misuse, sexual health, and emotional wellbeing.

50. Outstanding attention is given to children and young people who are looked after in order to keep them safe. Most children in care are placed within the borough boundary and there has been a successful and concerted effort to reduce the use of 'out of borough' placements. The majority of those placed 'out of borough' now live within 20 miles. On the last full year of data, 92% of children looked after were 20 miles or less from home compared to the England average of 72%. Only 5% were placed over 20 miles from home compared with the England average of 17% and this was for clear placement reasons. The majority of looked after children and young people in the borough are placed in foster homes with good placement stability. In Knowsley only 6.9% of children experienced three or more moves in a year compared with the England average of 10.7% and long term stability is also comparatively good. Performance against this indicator has been sustained since 2006 with year-on-year improvement.

51. A range of preventative services aimed at children in need helps reduce the need to place children and young people unnecessarily in care and provides good support to those who have entered the system and are ready to return home. Partners cooperate well to ensure that relevant joint services are provided and kept under constant review. Knowsley takes its corporate parenting role very seriously, and councillors are fully trained in their responsibilities. Visits to children's homes and centres are made by designated officers and councillors on a regular basis. Councillors are appropriately checked against the National Criminal Records database. Reports on care services are brought to the scrutiny committee, at which there is representation by young people. Participation by children and young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services is good. Advocacy and independent visiting services are provided by National Youth Advocacy Service and assist in enabling children and young people to have their voices heard. A toolkit has been developed to elicit the views of children with difficulties in communication and there are numerous groups run by looked after young people themselves in order to enable them to influence service delivery. Young advisers, including looked after children young advisers, support other young people to become engaged and to participate at the service planning and development level.

52. The impact of services enabling looked after children and young people to enjoy and achieve is outstanding. There is evidence of some outstanding practice and extremely dedicated and committed practitioners working well in partnership at all levels. This is noticeably improving outcomes for children and young people in the care of Knowsley. Provision is increasingly 'joined up' through co-location, for example in family and children's centres, and some excellent practice developed and shared by different practitioners such as speech and language therapists, portage, the education support team, learning mentors and educational psychologists. The introduction of creative strategies to improve observation and assessment in the foundation stage, such as the EXE Project (experiential learning), is resulting in the early identification of need and swifter multi-agency intervention. There are good examples of impact on individual young children and their carers in terms of improving learning by

identifying the child's particular interests, supporting behaviour and speech and language development.

53. Robust monitoring of strategies and individual attainment and progress at the Foundation Stage and beyond, clearly demonstrates what works and provides practitioners with a more detailed picture of improvement as well as where changes are needed. The adoption of these innovative approaches is clearly fuelling the enthusiasm and interest of staff throughout all phases of education leading to noticeably improving practice and outcomes for children and young people. Local authority services are having a significant impact on improving the skills levels, knowledge and understanding staff have about the needs of all groups of vulnerable children and young people. This is contributing to reducing gaps in attainment with other groups of children and young people in the country and improving educational outcomes for looked after children and young people. The support and challenge that schools receive in terms of vulnerable students overall, including children looked after, is exemplary. The services provided by the early years improvement service, inclusion, standards and effectiveness services and work around behaviour, attendance and monitoring individual progress of looked after children are all good or better.

54. The attendance of looked after children is outstanding. The average for the group as a whole is currently around 97% (based on local data), although individual attendance is often higher. There have been no permanent exclusions of looked after children in the past 12 months and fixed term rates remain comparably low. Despite some variation, the educational attainment of looked after children is outstanding overall when compared to similar authorities and the national picture, even though gaps still remain when compared to the educational attainment of all children and young people in Knowsley. At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2008/09, the proportion of looked after children achieving Level 4+ in English and mathematics was broadly average. Educational outcomes at age 16 in 2008/09 were outstanding overall taking account of the variations in individual young people's abilities. The proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with five or more GCSEs at A*-C or GNVQ equivalent (the key performance indicator for this group) at 29% in 2009 was well above the 14% national rate and Knowsley has the best performance on this measure in its comparator group. In addition 76% of eligible looked after children achieved at least one GCSE or equivalent at A*-G at the end of Y11 in 2009 and 86% of eligible looked after children achieved five GCSEs at A*-G or above which is almost double the proportion found nationally (43%). The monitoring of educational attainment and support for looked after children and care leavers educated outside the area are also robust.

55. Looked after children and care leavers have access to a good range of leisure activities and are provided with a free leisure pass. Programmes delivered jointly with the youth service and a range of other partners including the police and the ranger service are particularly effective in responding to local

community needs. The education support team and personal advisors use funding streams creatively to minimise barriers to participation.

56. Children and young people who are looked after in Knowsley have good opportunities to make a positive contribution. Scrutiny processes are well managed, involve children and young people and ensure good participation and discussion on key issues affecting their lives. The Mayor's awards and Duke of Edinburgh scheme operated through the local authority encourage and celebrate achievements of children and young people who are looked after. There is a strong police lead on 'not criminalising' children and young people and working with partners to divert from formal processes at early stages. There is clear evidence of the positive impact of police officers in influencing behaviours and choice. Their presence in schools is highly regarded and influential in promoting good citizenship and safety. Trends in the reduction of offending in Knowsley are good given the context of high deprivation and cross generational criminality. Work is well targeted, inclusive and showing positive results in terms of diversion from criminality. The trend of offending for all children and young people, including those looked after in the area is downward and substantially below Merseyside averages. First time entrants to the youth offending system are declining with a clear association with joint work in the borough to divert children from crime. The number of looked after children participating in their reviews is good and the independent reviewing officer service and the independent advocacy service are effective in helping and supporting looked after children and young people to articulate their wishes and feelings.

57. The impact of services in enabling looked after children and young people to achieve economic well-being is good. Care leavers are generally very positive about the plans in place to support their transition to adulthood. All care leavers are living in suitable accommodation and have a personal advisor. The partnership has made good progress in engaging young people in education, employment and training and performs well when measured against national benchmarks. Data shows that 89% of care leavers were in education, employment or training in 2009 compared to 63% nationally. This was the second best performance in the comparator group. Care leavers receive strong support to access high-quality provision that enables them to continue their education or training post-16.

58. Looked after young people are helped in a variety of ways to obtain work or to go to college. Clear targets are set to reduce the number of looked after children not in education, employment or training and the current rate is now below that of similar areas and in the context of Merseyside. Personal advisors as well as employability officers concentrate on supporting young people to work or to enter further education and training. The council offers training opportunities to young people, including those looked after. There is a good strategy in place to prioritise looked after children who are not in education or training. Connexions work with looked after young people from age 14, liaising with the leaving care team and Knowsley College. Weekly meetings are

routinely held to monitor progress and this aspect extends to young people placed out of borough. This is good practice. There is a range of alternative provision for 400 vulnerable young people which includes some of those who are looked after. They are engaged in 20 different work-based learning opportunities usually attending three days each week.

The quality of provision

Grade: 2 (Good)

59. The looked after children service in Knowsley is good. There is strong commitment across the partnership for looked after children and young people and to delivering effective services aimed at improving their life chances. The service utilises good quality management information to plan and deliver services which, in turn, has informed the Corporate Parenting Strategy and subsequent strategic implementation. This development work is sustained and managers clearly know their services well. They are aware that services need to be further refined for children with disabilities and transitional planning processes.

60. The outcomes for the majority of looked after children are good or outstanding and children and young people spoken to or surveyed as part of the inspection state they are satisfied with their care arrangements. There is good evidence of effective partnership working across the borough to focus on the needs of individual looked after children and a wide range of support services provided by the agencies and groups concerned. The borough also has an outstanding record in supporting looked after children placed in Knowsley by other local authorities. Commendably the authority affords these children and young people the same good levels of help and attention. Support from health services and professionals is outstanding demonstrated by a commitment to fast-track looked after children where a health need is identified and to provide focused support in respect of sexual health, healthy eating and emotional care. The operational manager demonstrates strong direction and leadership and is responsible for a range of decisions in relation to care planning and use of resources. Staff have access to visible managers to support them in case work and provide appropriate managerial oversight.

61. Looked after children teams are established to ensure a continued and sustained focus on their needs and this is reflected in the quality of the work undertaken by the team. Further work to strengthen the quality of direct work and to ensure views and feelings are suitably recorded and acted upon are being implemented. Strategically, user engagement is good with examples of effective involvement and participation in committees and scrutiny panels. However, this is not yet fully reflected at a case planning level or in ready access to complaints and representation systems. Although young people have a range of routes to make complaints, opportunities are being lost to collect information so that it can be used to systematically influence service delivery. There are good examples of advocacy and support being offered to looked after children and young people. However, not all were familiar with the service and those in foster care appeared to have limited access and understanding.

62. Arrangements for commissioning good quality placements are outstanding and the council is actively engaged in wider consortium based service commissioning arrangements through Placements North West. Monitoring arrangements are good and swift action is taken where concerns are raised. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is playing an effective role in managing complaints against staff and in accordance with the requirement of Working Together. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place and she has taken up opportunities to network with other LADOs across the region to share information and good practice. The fostering manager is clear about the reporting procedures and processes to ensure that allegations against foster carers are dealt with fairly and appropriately. The monitoring aspects of these roles are less well understood within operational teams and general training for staff has not specifically highlighted the importance of this work.

63. There are good quality assessments of looked after children and young people in the borough which identify need and lead to comprehensive plans. Although considerable effort is made to ascertain the wishes and feelings of looked after children and young people they are not being consistently recorded in a way that ensures that planning takes them fully into account. The majority of young people are well placed, either within the borough or in close proximity. Matching processes within foster care are well developed to ensure there is good placement stability and the council's children's homes only occasionally admit children in an emergency and then only within clear statements of purpose. Fostering services have been rated as good and the children's homes in the borough are good or better with the exception of one home which has recently been judged as adequate by Ofsted. Managers of these services have a good record of responding quickly to external reports and recommendations. The arrangements for placing children in external placements are good, and young people are regularly visited and where possible there is continuation of the educational placement and health care including CAMHS involvement.

64. There are creative measures in place to limit the number of young people, entering the care system. In particular the work of the targeted Family Support Service and the changing focus of the Pupil Referral Unit have enabled more young people to stay within their families. Discussions with young people have indicated they are prepared well for planned placement moves. However, staff indicate that not all placement planning is fully developed to prevent placement breakdown or moving young people in an emergency.

65. The majority of looked after children plans are comprehensive. Internal audit processes are in place and have identified that not all young people have been involved in the preparation of a meaningful personal education plan (PEP) or had copies of their health care action plan. Although this does not appear to be adversely affecting education or health outcomes these plans would help to reinforce the respective engagement of professionals in specific tasks and ensure appropriate levels of user engagement. A new permanency policy has been developed and in particular there is a drive to discharge care orders on

children placed at home. The move to encourage the greater use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) particularly for young people aged over 10 is supported by helpful financial packages and ongoing support from the authority. Looked after children care plans are regularly reviewed and the use of the placement planning meetings ensures that they stay on track. There is good managerial oversight and evidence of supervision decisions being recorded on electronic file. The outcomes for all young people are monitored through regular meetings held at service manager level.

66. The Independent Reviewing Officers ensure all reviews take place within statutory timescales. For young people placed outside the borough the frequency of review is increased to three monthly intervals, which is good. Good effort is made to engage children and young people in their reviews and levels of participation remain consistently and comparatively high. Nevertheless, it is not always clear that all young people are thoroughly consulted and that reviews are held at a time and place to minimise disruption to their day to day lives. There are some creative examples of integrated care packages including the good engagement of schools and centres for learning, CAMHS, Connexions, Youth offending services and the police.

67. Leaving care provision in the borough is good. All young people are in suitable accommodation with an outstanding commitment by the council to support education, training and employment. The council provides a strong lead in this respect though the provision of a substantial number of apprenticeships and Connexions is suitably engaged in joint work to support care leavers. A new tendering process is in place to further enhance the range of leaving care services available in the borough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2 (Good)

68. Political and managerial leadership is strong and determined to improve the life chances of all looked after children and young people in the borough. Strategic planning processes and partnerships ensure that the needs of looked after children and young people are prioritised and kept to the fore of deliberations. Managers from all partner agencies contribute well to the delivery of priorities and this is evidenced through routine monitoring of performance against both local and national indicators. Corporate parenting arrangements are strong with a determined approach to keep this fresh in the minds of the public and staff. The analysis of need and outcomes information is routinely made available and there is effective scrutiny of services in terms of their design, impact and value for money. Children and young people are actively involved in a wide range of strategic planning meetings and groups including scrutiny. The children and young person's plan placed high priority on the needs of looked after children and young people in the borough and the responsibilities of staff and partners to raise aspiration.

69. Performance management and quality assurance are good. Joint work to divert children and young people from the care system through effective early

intervention and support has ensured good stability in the general care population in terms of short and longer-term placements and joint support services. Trends in respect of children entering the care system are carefully monitored against an outstanding approach to measuring need within the wider community. This has ensured that partners have a good grasp of service requirements of the looked after group in respect of education, health, training, offending and after-care. Consequently they have been able to build suitable capacity to respond to individual and collective needs. Service commissioning is effective with good monitoring systems in place to ensure compliance with contracts and service level agreements. The council includes specific targets in contracts against *Every Child Matters* outcomes. The majority of looked after children and young people are accommodated in local foster placements. The borough provides several two-bedded children's homes and commissions specialist services from the independent sector to meet the needs of young people who are not in family placements. Workforce planning is good and is ensuring that the workforce is suitably trained in work with looked after children and young people. Regular clinical audits are used by commissioners to strengthen services to looked after children and young people.

70. Looked after children and young people are systematically engaged in planning services and there are some good examples of how their views have influenced plans. This aspect is well developed at a political and strategic level and in schools but is less evident in case recording. Advocacy is available through NYAS with good examples of individual pieces of work by this agency with looked after young people. Independent reviewing arrangements are suitably robust with all reviews held on time and with comparatively high levels of participation. Children and young people are satisfied with the services they receive, they feel safe in their placements and enjoy good relationships with the adults who care for and work with them. This is confirmed by the survey undertaken for this inspection and in the partnership's own surveys which show that the majority of children and young people consider they receive good or very good services and support.

71. Partnership working is very well established at all levels and is outstanding. This stems from the explicit commitment from all agencies to promote the welfare of all looked after children and young people in the borough, including those placed by other local authorities and to providing opportunities for achievement and success. There is an outstanding understanding of need in an area of significant deprivation with a clear focus on the specific needs of this part of the population. Participation of partners in strategic planning processes is good with coherent joint strategies in place including an updated children and young persons plan with emphasis on looked after children and young people. Partners have responded systematically and successfully to a number of key issues affecting outcomes for looked after children and young people including education, sexual health, youth offending, training and employment and conception rates. This targeted approach has led to marked improvements in performance and joint understanding of the particular needs of this group of children and young people. The voluntary

sector also plays an important role in the provision of local services to support a good range activities and opportunities. Careful attention is paid across the partnership to the need to safeguard looked after children and young people. Good systems are in place, supported by KSCB, in respect of children who go missing from care, anti-bullying and substance misuse. The partnership is extending levels of service commissioning and has robust systems in place to monitor performance, costs and outcomes. A robust approach is also adopted towards services that do not deliver the desired results and arrangements for de-commissioning are in place. Senior joint health and social care management posts exist to lead partnership working and budgets and staffing has been suitably aligned to increase capacity and value for money.

72. Considerable effort is made to understand the local population and community needs. This has enabled the partnership to tailor responses well to the different communities and groups across the borough including looked after children and young people. There is a comprehensive range of activities being undertaken to tackle issues such as child poverty and partners have secured additional funding through participation in national pilots and projects to actively tackle disadvantage. The joint commitment to equality and inclusion is good. The council achieved Level 3 in the Equality Standard and is currently working towards the achievement of 'excellent' under this new system by 2012. The roll out of co-located and integrated services in the north, central and south area teams is helping to deliver services which are closely aligned to meet the needs of the specific communities. MARAC has made good progress and had a significant impact for families and children who have been subjected to racism and good analysis of local data and intelligence is ensuring activities are being effectively targeted. Practice in schools and increasingly in private and voluntary settings is developing well to tackle aspects of equality and discrimination and this is monitored very effectively. Concerted efforts are narrowing the majority of attainment gaps at a faster rate than found nationally and in statistical neighbours.

73. The contribution of partners to achieving value for money is outstanding. Placement commissioning is strong and well managed. Tendering and contracting processes are underpinned by a clear focus on both costs and quality which enables additional provision to be purchased at an advantageous price. Service specifications outline the required quality standards and consistent monitoring ensures that they are delivered. The partnership has been active and successful in securing substantial funds from Government and other sources in order to meet its ambitious targets. Scrutiny arrangements, including financial management are robust.

Record of main findings: Knowsley

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
Outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe: effectiveness of services in taking reasonable steps to ensure that children and young people are safe	Good
Children and young people feel safe: effectiveness of services in helping to ensure that children and young people feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness including complaints	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children and families	Good
Case planning, review and recording	Good
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Good
User engagement	Adequate
Partnerships	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good
Value for money	Outstanding

Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers	
Being healthy	Outstanding
Staying safe	Outstanding
Enjoying and achieving	Outstanding
Making a positive contribution	Good
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	
Service responsiveness	Adequate
Assessment and direct work with children	Good
Case planning, review and recording	Good
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development	Good
User engagement	Good
Partnerships	outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good
Value for money	outstanding