

# Outstanding local authority children's services 2009

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This report highlights aspects of best practice in the 10 children's services judged by Ofsted in 2009 to be performing excellently; this is the highest of four ratings. In these highest-performing local authorities, the overall effectiveness of a very large majority of inspected services and settings was good or excellent. This report analyses some of the key factors that led to their high performance and illustrates these with practical examples.

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## Foreword by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

This report continues Ofsted's emphasis on sharing examples of excellent performance. The focus is on the full range of children's services provided and commissioned by local authorities and their partners.

In 2009, 10 children's services were rated by Ofsted as performing excellently. In this report we have analysed some of the key factors that have led to their high performance and illustrated these with practical examples. To some extent, these examples will reflect elements of practice elsewhere but, in each of these local authorities, they do things very well across a wide range of services.

The 10 local authorities have contributed to the report by providing case studies which illustrate what they themselves think has made a significant difference. As these examples show, there are no quick fixes. These children's services have performed excellently because of their sustained and consistent approach to improvement. They know the needs of children and families very well and even when they have made substantial progress, they continue to challenge themselves to do more. One message stands out in this report: excellent children's services make a difference not only by improving outcomes for all children but also for those who are more vulnerable. These are not seen as incompatible priorities.

This report is intended as a discussion document for people in local authorities and in partner organisations who are involved in improving outcomes for children and young people. I hope that elected members and senior officers, in particular, will find it helpful in analysing their own services against the characteristics of authorities which have been judged to be excellent.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Cusko Gilbert". A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature.

## Summary

In December 2009, Ofsted published its children's services assessments for local authorities in England. Inspectors judged 10 children's services to be performing excellently, the highest of four ratings. This report highlights aspects of best practice within these high-performing local authorities, and each has contributed a case study.

As said in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's Annual Report in 2009, in these highest-performing local authorities, the overall effectiveness of a very large majority of inspected services and settings was good or excellent.<sup>1</sup> Children had a good start in early years provision and most continued to do well throughout their education. These local authorities had strong management arrangements, especially in children's social care, and there were many examples of the good involvement of children and families in making decisions about the services that affected their lives.

Excellent children's services ensure that, wherever possible, each child receives a service which meets her or his particular needs so that all children thrive and make good progress. Furthermore, there is a high level of good or better provision for children and young people whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Local authorities judged as excellent had a good track record of closing the gaps in outcomes between these children and others of the same age. They take the views of young people, parents and carers whom they serve very seriously and find creative and innovative ways of meeting their needs.

Above all, it is consistency and ambition that have led to improved outcomes. While excellent authorities already do the things that they should be doing very well, they know that there is always more to do. Aspiration and tenacity are strong features of the way that they are led and managed.

The main characteristics of the best-performing authorities show:

- consistency in practice that is driving real improvement of local services
- a clear focus on the children and young people who need support most and on their progress and development
- a deep understanding of local children, families and communities.

Each of these characteristics is considered in more detail in the report and illustrated by the case studies.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2008–2009*, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Annual-Report/2008-09/The-Annual-Report-of-Her-Majesty-s-Chief-Inspector-of-Education-Children-s-Services-and-Skills-2008-09](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Annual-Report/2008-09/The-Annual-Report-of-Her-Majesty-s-Chief-Inspector-of-Education-Children-s-Services-and-Skills-2008-09).

This in-depth understanding of local children, families and communities has two key elements. The first is the 10 authorities' use of information about performance and progress with a focus on the needs of children, young people and the services provided for them. The second is how their engagement of children, young people, their families and communities influences and improves services.

The 10 children's services also have a sustained and consistent approach to practice that is driving improvement in local services. They scrutinise their performance and ensure consistent practice through robust performance management and quality assurance arrangements, including in the services commissioned by them, and learn from other sources of evidence to improve what they do. Strong and effective partnerships are seen as crucial. They challenge local providers of services to make further improvements, and they welcome external scrutiny. Above all, they have high expectations of and ambition for all children in their authority; they set challenging targets and, even when these are met, they aspire to achieve more.

The authorities make a difference by improving outcomes for all children and, in particular, for those who are more vulnerable. There is evident commitment to ensuring that all children and young people succeed. They focus on continuing improvement for all and focus on the children and young people that need support and improvement most. They ensure that support is designed around the needs, progress and development of individual children; they have a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention, turning this from an ambition into actual practice; and they adapt their services to reflect the particular backgrounds of different groups of children and communities. Where the authorities do not provide the services themselves, they commission them from other providers in the private and voluntary sector, ensuring that the services are of high quality to meet the needs of the children and young people they serve.

The majority of local authority children's services have some good, even excellent, features, but excellence in these 10 authorities is marked by consistency: in the way things are done; in the quality of services offered to all children and young people; and in improving outcomes.

## Characteristics of excellent children's services

### Introduction

1. Children's services include all the provision made within a local authority area for children and young people. This ranges from universal services, such as schools, to specialist services for children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, such as children's homes. Local authorities have a lead role in providing and commissioning services and improving outcomes for all children and young people. The health service, the police and other public agencies share this responsibility with local authorities.
2. In 2009, Ofsted introduced a new annual assessment of local authority children's services. This assessment derived from front-line findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and data about the outcomes for children and young people in each local authority area. The inspection evidence included inspections of early years education and childcare, maintained schools, children's social care, provision within the learning and skills sector and the trends over time.
3. Children's services were judged on a four-point scale, showing whether the authority was performing excellently, well, adequately or poorly. Within each level, there were stronger and weaker aspects of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' did not mean that everything was perfect. Similarly, within a judgement of 'performs poorly', there may have been some aspects of the overall service that were adequate or even good and some services may already have been showing signs of improvement.

### Children's services ratings for 2009

4. Ofsted's inspectors found that the large majority of local authorities and their partners were providing good children's services, often in challenging circumstances. The children's services performance ratings for 2009 showed that just over two thirds (68%) of local authorities were judged as performing well or better, with 10 being excellent.

**Table 1: Children’s services rating 2009**

	Number of children’s services	Percentage of children’s services
Performs excellently (grade 4)	10	7%
Performs well (grade 3)	93	61%
Performs adequately (grade 2)	40	25%
Performs poorly (grade 1)	9	6%
Total	152	100%

### **Children’s services which performed excellently**

5. In the best-performing local authorities, the overall effectiveness of a very large majority of inspected services and settings was good or excellent. Children in these local authority areas had a good start in the early years, and most continued to do well throughout school and in their continuing education. They tended to achieve good examination results at the age of 16 and move successfully into further education, training or work at the age of 17 and beyond.
6. Local authorities which were judged as excellent also had a good track record of closing the gap between children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and others of the same age. They had achieved success, for example, in reducing the attainment gap for children eligible for free school meals, for those with special educational needs and for minority ethnic groups. They did this by ensuring the provision of good services for all children and young people, for example, by rigorous systems for monitoring closely the educational progress of looked after children, ensuring that focused personal support was available when required, and holding schools to account for the outcomes of these children and young people.
7. In the best local authorities there were many examples of strong arrangements for quality assurance and performance management in children’s social care, and of successful strategies to minimise the number of changes of placement for looked after children. Children were seen as individuals and enjoyed strong relationships with adults who knew them well and monitored their progress and development.

8. In the best local authorities, elected members and senior managers had good, first-hand knowledge of the services that they were responsible for and the children and learners that they served. Even the most senior officers knew the issues facing front-line workers and were receptive to feedback from them. They had a strong grasp of the challenges in providing good practice. They knew what good social care looked like, in policy and practice, and they questioned, checked and challenged in order to make improvements. They took the views of the young people, parents and carers that they served very seriously, and used creative and innovative ways of involving them in decision-making about the services that affected their lives.
9. The way in which local authorities worked with other organisations was mature and effective, and included strong contributions from the voluntary and community sector. Accountabilities and responsibilities were absolutely clear. Management and leadership were strong at all levels. Communication was effective and clear throughout the organisation and with key partners. This meant that all those involved were able to compile a full profile of individual children, coordinating and commissioning the different services to meet their needs and monitoring fully their development and progress.

### **Evidence of continuing progress**

10. Eight of the local authorities have had unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment. None of them received areas for priority action and their strengths clearly outweighed the areas for development. These strengths frequently highlighted the following features of effective practice:
  - prompt action to investigate concerns and ensure that children are safeguarded
  - good supervision, quality assurance and audit systems to ensure good assessments and effective decision-making
  - feedback on assessments from children and families to enhance practice
  - comprehensive child protection plans to improve outcomes
  - good working relationships with partner agencies
  - dissemination of learning from serious case reviews to front-line staff which results in improved practice
  - low numbers of agency staff as a result of good opportunities for training and development and effective policies for recruitment and retention
  - effective oversight of multi-agency safeguarding practice by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## The 10 local authorities

11. This report is focused on the work of the 10 local authorities which were judged to be performing excellently:
  - Blackburn with Darwen
  - Camden
  - City of London
  - Kensington and Chelsea
  - Kingston upon Thames
  - Lewisham
  - Richmond upon Thames
  - Tower Hamlets
  - Wandsworth
  - York.
12. Case studies have been drawn together in this report to describe one key development in each of the local authorities in order to illustrate their effectiveness.
13. The approaches described in the case studies reflect the kind of developments which the local authorities themselves believe have made a significant difference. Other local authorities may also have introduced similar initiatives; however, for the local authorities described here, the consistency and quality of their implementation are significant in improving outcomes for children and young people.
14. These local authorities displayed three key characteristics:
  - consistency in practice that is driving real improvement of local services
  - a clear focus on the children and young people who need support most and on their progress and development
  - a deep understanding of local children, families and communities.

These characteristics are considered in detail in the next section and illustrated by the case studies. In many instances, the case studies demonstrate good practice in more than one of these areas.

## Consistent practice driving real improvement

15. The first characteristic of the excellent children's services is their ambitious, systematic and determined focus on improving local performance.
- They constantly scrutinise their performance through robust performance management and quality assurance arrangements and learn from other sources of evidence how to improve their practice. This inevitably includes: the rigorous scrutiny of performance data; assessments of outcomes; and frequent review of information from practitioners, families, communities and from all children and young people in the authority as well as specific groups. There is a commitment to transparency. Some children's services are particularly effective in engaging with the local community in local areas or clusters so that they can challenge progress and influence the shape of developments that respond to local need.
  - Data are then used to target support or intervention, to redefine priorities, and to analyse and reach an understanding of how to improve performance. Above all, effective use of data results in a real difference in services for children and young people, and as a result has a real impact on outcomes.
  - Strong and effective partnerships are seen as crucial. These partnerships have created shared ambitions and priorities. They are clear about what needs improving, and why, and use their collective resources to bring this about. Partnership working in these situations combines effort effectively to achieve a greater impact on improvement in the quality of services and on outcomes for children and young people.
  - They challenge all local services to make further improvements and welcome external scrutiny. Excellent children's services constantly find ways to challenge local services to make improvements, whether they provide these services directly, where they commission services or whether they share responsibility with other organisations such as health services or the police. They are not afraid to take action where they believe that further progress can be made, even where inspectors have judged services to be good.
  - The challenge can come from a range of sources such as managers, consultants employed by the authority, parents, practitioners and the wider community. Excellent children's services not only welcome external scrutiny but also create external pressure for improvement, for example assessment by outside organisations, peer reviews, mock inspections and 'mystery shopping'. Whichever method is used, it is selected carefully as a means of ensuring that local services, schools and other settings seek ways of raising their performance even further.
  - Above all, they have consistently high expectations of all children in their authority; they set challenging targets and, even when these are met, want

to achieve more. They are also constantly seeking to raise aspirations and to buck the national trend of underachievement by certain groups of children.

16. These authorities often achieve national targets in advance of government expectations. They are not complacent and acknowledge any shortfalls in reaching their goals. Solutions are frequently creative and innovative. Setbacks act as a spur for renewed action to tackle concerns, even when this means making difficult, and sometimes unpopular, decisions.

### **Focusing on children and young people who need support most**

17. Excellent children's services place great importance on raising the achievement of vulnerable groups and narrowing the attainment gap with others. Improving outcomes for all children and those who are more vulnerable are not seen as incompatible priorities.
18. The focus on reducing inequalities is part of local authority-wide policy and practice and reflects the ambitions of all elected members and officers, not just those working in children's services. The approach has an impact on all developments for children, including in particular localities, engagement with parents and local communities, and casework planning for individual children. Sometimes these children's services have prioritised one particular group of children about whom they have concern; most often, they focus on several groups at the same time.
19. Three key features of work to raise performance and narrow attainment gaps are common to all 10 children's services.
  - They know very well which specific groups and individual children need to be targeted, why they are doing so and what outcomes are expected as a result. Various multi-agency teams of professionals work closely together and communicate very well. Local authorities constantly review and evaluate the differences that services are making and reconfigure support as necessary. Services are configured to make a difference through effective multi-agency working.
  - They have a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Emerging concerns are identified at an early stage, leading to properly targeted support from a range of services. This emphasis is deeply ingrained in the thinking of managers and staff and consistently and genuinely shapes policy, practice and funding, leading to improved outcomes. There is clear evidence of targeting resources to early intervention and to assessment of its impact and value for money.
  - They adapt their services to respond to the diverse backgrounds of different groups of children and communities. Cultural needs are understood very well, often through parental groups, and learning has been used to change practices and tackle issues that have affected local performance.

## A deep understanding of local children, families and communities

20. Excellent children's services have a very good understanding of the needs of their local area.
- The use of data is a key driver in improving performance. Data are used routinely and rigorously by elected members, senior officers, children's services teams and settings, to make decisions, allocate resources and review progress. Such data go beyond the headline local authority-wide statistics and performance measures to the close examination of information for specific communities within the local authority or for particular groups of children. This ensures that support and resources are well targeted.
  - Arrangements for consultation and engagement with children, young people, families and communities are highly effective because children's services understand what local people want and need. These are not one-off events, but are embedded in regular local practices and processes. The local authorities and their partners tailor their methods to suit the needs of specific groups of children, young people and adults and they are willing to innovate and experiment with different approaches. They build up a picture of local requirements from surveys, such as Tellus, from focus groups for specialist groups and from regular forums.<sup>2</sup> They also train young people and families to consult others.
  - Effective consultation is much more than a paper exercise. The full involvement of elected members and senior officers signals its importance. They ensure that the views of those they consult make a real difference to decision-making, influence new developments and improve services. Most importantly, the views of those consulted can be seen to make a difference.

## Pictures of excellent practice

### Blackburn with Darwen: 'One school, one family, all our children'

#### Context and background

21. Blackburn with Darwen has a population of 140,000. It has the highest population percentage in the age range 0–19 of any local authority in England and Wales. The proportion of children from a minority ethnic background is growing, especially in Blackburn, where over half of the intake in primary schools is now from Asian backgrounds. The children are mainly from the Muslim community.

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<sup>2</sup> Tellus surveys have asked for the views of children and young people from Years 6, 8 and 10 about their local area.

22. Blackburn with Darwen is one of the 10% most deprived local authorities in England. Against this background, attainment at 16 is much closer to the national average than might have been predicted. The national indicators used to measure educational gaps between different groups of children show that Blackburn with Darwen has been doing better than the national average.

### **A shared philosophy with partners and across agencies**

23. Blackburn with Darwen has shown a track record of strong and sustained performance in schools and other settings through a combination of successful innovation, strong multi-agency working and extremely positive relationships with schools and their leaders. These factors have provided the foundation for continuing improvement in an area that presents significant challenges and high levels of deprivation.
24. The local authority has had a consistent commitment to developing and sustaining positive partnerships with the local community and with a wide range of stakeholders. This has led to a shared philosophy that seeks to improve the life chances of children and young people – ‘one school, one family, all our children’. Agencies have worked together to tackle the diverse needs of the borough, using a unified approach that is also tailored to ensure the best outcomes for all children and young people.
25. There are many examples of effective multi-agency partnerships. New arrivals from Eastern Europe and Traveller communities receive timely and culturally sensitive support to help them settle in and contribute to the community. Successful joint working between health services and partners has enhanced services which support the emotional health and well-being of children and young people. The Pakistani Learners’ Forum helped the local mosque to work together with parents and pupils from neighbouring schools to raise aspirations and achievement. Blackburn College and the Tauheedal Islam Girls High School have developed A/AS-level provision in a way that is culturally sensitive to the young women’s needs.

### **Early intervention**

26. Early intervention is also a key strength of the local authority’s approach. This is carried out through multi-agency assessment and support panels for young children. Those who will need specialist help from the start are identified before they are born and support is put in place for the parents. Children’s centres have been designed specifically to support those parents from vulnerable groups at an early stage in developing the prerequisites for language skills. The result can be seen in the increasing percentage of children in the borough who are at a good level of development at the end of the Reception year and above the national average. Agencies such as the health authority, social care staff, speech and language therapists and welfare services such as Jobcentre Plus are well represented at children’s centres and on the Early Support Multi-Agency

Panel. Ante-natal support at children's centres includes a strong emphasis on supporting fathers.

### **'Language for learning and for life'**

27. The partnership approach can be seen in the development of Blackburn with Darwen's 'Language for learning and for life'. This is a key strategy for minimising the difference in performance between the lowest attaining and most vulnerable pupils, such as White British boys and Pakistani heritage boys, and other pupils. At the heart of this strategy is the Language for Life project which was introduced in 2006 in those primary schools which faced the greatest challenges and had consistently poor performance in literacy and numeracy. Results over a three-year period have shown outstanding improvements in attainment and progress from the Early Years Foundation Stage to the end of primary school, and particularly strong progress in the attainment of pupils with special educational needs.
28. Various learning networks have been established where primary schools and secondary schools work together to identify priorities and plan programmes around an array of themes and learning goals, for example to raise the attainment of targeted pupils at the start of secondary school. These networks are essentially workshops held between teaching colleagues and others from a range of professional and community backgrounds. They come together to explore, plan and implement new and effective ways of improving the educational and life chances of children and young people. These have helped to raise attainment but also to extend the range of opportunities available across communities.
29. The improvement in performance has been mirrored across key stages and over time; most importantly, the difference between the performance of those children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and others of the same age is becoming smaller than in similar areas and nationally. This is a significant achievement as these most vulnerable groups of learners constitute a substantial proportion of local children and young people who have improved faster than the average for the borough as a whole. For example, young people eligible for free school meals were three times more likely to leave school with five good GCSEs in 2009 than in 2003.
30. The 'one school, one family, all our children' approach to partnership working has been a highly effective means of adapting external and national initiatives to local needs. This has included the sharing of skills and expertise from within the school communities and also across the wider partnership arena, including health services, local businesses, the voluntary, community and faith sectors and the local police. The school improvement team has an outstanding record of brokering support from one school for another one. Headteachers and other senior staff frequently offer to lead schools that are in difficulties. A recent collaboration has drawn together in a federation the most successful and

'outstanding' secondary school in the borough with the lowest attaining secondary school. The senior staff involved have agreed to a personal performance framework that is focused on improving the performance of the weaker school. In addition, external services and agencies are invited to support these school initiatives where their contributions can guarantee even greater value.

### **Using data to sustain improvement**

31. Robust data analysis is at the heart of the sustained improvement. Strategic-level data analysis is one of the key performance management tools for setting priorities and targeting resources. The local authority has chosen not to wait for validated data from the Department for Education when providing performance information for schools, as the timing of data is such an important tool for planning ahead. Support from the specialist data team is available throughout the year and the local authority does not hold back from intervening when necessary. Good performance information, which is consistent in format and explained coherently, enables individual schools to identify, plan and target areas in need of improvement.
32. This emphasis on data is a key reason for the levels of progress found in Blackburn with Darwen. Outcomes for groups and individuals are good or better in over 80% of schools inspected; capacity for sustained improvement is good or better in 75%; leadership and management are good or better in 75% of schools inspected. Self-evaluation is also an area of strength, and has helped schools to become even more confident in focusing on areas for improvement themselves. As a result of this focused work, 80% of schools were judged by inspectors to be good or better under the previous inspection framework. This pattern of performance has been consistent over many years and with different inspection frameworks.
33. While rightly proud of its achievements, the borough is still acutely aware of further areas for improvement, such as the number of the most deprived young people who achieve five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics. The acknowledgement and analysis of issues; the constructive candour of discussions with schools; the creative and collaborative approach to problem-solving through partnerships; and a multi-agency approach are the cornerstones of previous achievement and provide the basis for further sustainable improvement.

### **Camden: a virtual school for children in care**

#### **Context and background**

34. Camden is an inner-London borough consisting of 18 wards. Five of these have sub-areas which are among the 30% most deprived nationally. The population is 231,900. This includes 45,300 children and young people aged 19 and under.

The school-age population is growing. Camden's communities are ethnically diverse; 76% of primary and 69% of secondary school pupils are from minority ethnic groups.

35. Over the last three years the number of looked after children and young people in Camden has remained stable at around 270. A third of them have statements of special educational need. Two thirds are educated in schools outside Camden.

### **The Camden Academy**

36. The Camden Academy is the local authority's all-age virtual school for looked after children. It was established in December 2006 to provide an organisational framework to help raise educational standards for children and young people placed in educational settings in Camden and elsewhere. A Corporate Parenting Group comprising the local authority and multi-agency professionals acts as the governing body. Staffing of the academy consists of one full-time post, the Head of the Virtual School. Four consultants, two Connexions advisers and a primary special educational needs coordinator are part-time members of the team. Each consultant has responsibility for one key stage within the academy.
37. An integrated service for looked after children was formed in January 2007. This includes professionals from different agencies collaborating on each of the Every Child Matters outcome areas. The Head of the Academy is a member of the management team. This has enabled the academy to raise the profile of education for looked after children.
38. The academy is especially proud of its partnership work; in particular, multi-agency training and informative newsletters have given social workers and foster carers a greater understanding of the importance of educational outcomes for life chances and of the way that 'education protects'. Increasingly, schools are making contact with the academy as a partner in problem-solving discussions. The role of the designated teacher for looked after children in each school has been strengthened through a newly established forum for multi-agency training and advice that is supported by the academy.
39. The academy has restructured the borough's personal education plan for each child and young person in care so that it contributes to stable placements and prevents disrupted schooling by ensuring access to services and support. These plans are monitored closely by academy consultants, and weaknesses, such as poor analysis of need and target-setting, are challenged. Schools and social workers are supported and encouraged to produce high-quality plans. Consultants report an improvement in the quality of the data that schools are providing and the academy is now able to analyse the progress of individuals over time as well as identify patterns and trends across cohorts. An 'e-LAC' website is further improving the collection and sharing of information.

40. The academy has had a good impact on improving attendance at school in 2009 because of its effective attendance strategy. The local authority commissioned an independent company to provide daily and weekly school attendance reports, which are analysed by the academy. If a looked after young person has missed 10 days' schooling in an academic year, her or his social worker completes a report and, if appropriate, a problem-solving meeting is held with the academy. A multi-agency panel meets monthly to review cases. The effectiveness of the attendance strategy and the multi-agency attendance panel can be seen in the latest local data. These data compare the June 2008 figure of 15.8% of looked after children who had more than 25 days of absence from school with the June 2009 figure of 10.9%.
41. The academy has an important role as a 'think-tank' for looked after children and young people who cannot manage in mainstream schools. It is rightly proud of its tailor-made, personalised approach which includes features such as individualised timetables, one-to-one tuition and life-coaching.
42. An effective advisory and consultative service offers a creative approach to problem-solving. This is illustrated by three examples:

In one case, a young person had hardly attended school because of his insecure living conditions. The academy's interview and assessment showed that the young person had ability and aspirations. It explored many possible placements before finding the most suitable one and the young person has now been offered a place at Sussex University.

Another young person who was finding school life increasingly difficult rejected an offer of a place at a pupil referral unit and an opportunity to be part of a small learning group. The academy did not give up and an offer of one-to-one learning with a tutor was accepted. After a slow beginning the young person began to engage well with the tutor and produced written homework for the first time ever. With growing confidence, attendance became regular and timely. The young person has been supported with an application for a National Vocational Qualification course at college.

In another case, a gifted and talented young person was at risk of permanent exclusion from a mainstream school but was given the opportunity to study in a highly academic boarding school. He is now thriving at this school where he has the space, freedom and educational experience to achieve his ambitions.

43. A priority for the academy has been to challenge some schools on their provision for literacy for looked after children and young people by offering free training and materials for the new Sound Routes literacy intervention that has demonstrated improved literacy skills. There is also free training for foster carers in supporting literacy and a 'learning sack' project has been launched to

encourage reading at home. Practical strategies to improve performance begin with the measurement of children's outcomes and consideration of the success of interventions.

44. The central aim of the academy is to improve performance. There is a strong focus on ensuring that all looked after children achieve to the best of their ability. Consultants challenge schools if the children and young people are not making progress that is good enough. This encourages the schools, both those inside and outside the borough, to focus their attention on improving outcomes for the individual child or young person. The number of young people in each age group is small (11 pupils at Key Stage 2 and 35 at Key Stage 4 in 2009), but the academy's data for the pupils who have results at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 show that they all progressed by two levels in English and all but one made two levels of progress in mathematics. At Key Stage 4, the 2009 cohort shows improvements, compared with any of the previous three years, in the percentages for sitting exams, for attaining any pass, for one or more passes at A\* to G and for five passes A\* to G. There was also an improvement on the previous two years for gaining five passes at A\* to C. Training and advice are also offered to foster carers.
45. The integrated system of working and strong partnerships with health and social care services have led to a shared understanding of the impact of placement stability on educational outcomes. In its latest Children and Young People's Plan, the local authority identified as a priority the importance of minimising the number of changes of placement experienced by looked after children. The position has now improved and Camden is reporting its best ever long-term performance for this target. The local authority has found that a multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people has led to what it describes as real 'respect and trust within the partnership'. All partners now share a common purpose in corporate parenting and education is high on the agenda.

## **City of London: partnerships for young children**

### **Context and background**

46. The City of London has a small residential population of around 8,000 people. Approximately 800 are children and young people under the age of 19. The proportion of families with only one parent is much higher than the rate for England as a whole. Around 43% of residents aged 0–24 years come from a background other than White British. Although the City's socio-economic profile overall is relatively advantaged, there are very great differences between local areas. Most young people live in the more disadvantaged areas.
47. Children are served very well by the City of London and achieve excellent outcomes. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, achievement is above both similar areas and the national picture. The difference between the early years

performance of children whose circumstances make them vulnerable and others of the same age is much smaller than in similar areas and that found nationally. Local priorities are based on a good understanding of needs of the borough, including of local inequalities. Consultation with residents is extensive and regular. In particular, children and young people and their families with high levels of need are consulted fully and effectively on what they would like and how it is provided.

48. The exchange of information between services and agencies is extensive and effective. Ambitions are based on a very good, shared analysis and scrutiny of all this intelligence and are very clearly set out in planning documents. Nothing progresses without comprehensive collection and analysis of data, rigorous evaluation of other management information, and extensive consultation with potential providers and users of services. All partners work to the same vision and common priorities, with very strong leadership from elected members and senior officers. There is productive work with the Corporation of London, and the voluntary, community and business sectors, using the joint power and resources of key partners. Overall, there is a focus on removing barriers and boundaries, with partners being well supported and highly accountable.
49. The Playbuilder project and the Cass Children's Centre are particularly significant in terms of productive, professional multi-agency partnerships. Both stem from a strong culture of extensive child and family-centred support, both are underpinned by a clear vision that is not constrained by partnership boundaries, and both harness the collective power and resources of key partners in creative ways.

### **The Playbuilder project**

50. The Playbuilder project, 'Play in the City Gardens', is a strand of the City of London's play strategy. This innovative project has transformed small public gardens, which previously were used almost exclusively by city workers at lunchtimes on weekdays, into flexible, multi-purpose spaces. These now provide accessible, high-quality, challenging and safe opportunities for play for children and young people.
51. An extensive consultation was carried out to seek the views of children, young people and adults on existing play provision in the City of London, the types of provision that they would like and any local issues that affected their choices and opinions. The consultation included seven events around the city, at which a Play Poll was carried out. This used three different 'voting' forms for 5- to 13-year-olds, young people aged 14 to 19 and adults. These were collected in ballot boxes. At these events, children and young people were also invited to take part in a video diary, where they could talk about play facilities, and there was a competition in which they could design their 'dream play space'. The consultation highlighted the lack of public play facilities.

52. A comprehensive audit of all existing play provision was carried out, as well as an assessment of potential spaces where new provision could be developed. As the City of London itself is small, and many of its larger residential areas are located on the borders of neighbouring authorities, a supplementary audit of nearby provision in other boroughs was also undertaken. The findings of the audit showed the lack of publicly accessible, equipped playgrounds. As a result of the audit and the consultation, 'Play in the City Gardens' was born.
53. The project has had its challenges and has required extensive support from the City of London's partners. Adults enjoyed the formal environment of the borough, so community-based mediation work was necessary. In addition, the area has heritage status, some land is consecrated, much of it is not owned by the City, and millions of tourists use its facilities.
54. A strategic Play Partnership with its nominated Play Champion worked relentlessly to secure the support of all partners from the community, including its voluntary and business sectors. The partnership also needed to ensure the involvement of the relevant departments of the City of London Corporation, including Housing, Planning and Transportation, Open Spaces and the Family and Young People's Service. Barriers were broken down, and the importance of play in the development of children and young people was recognised by all groups. Creative use of partnership resources turned what children, young people and adults said they wanted into reality. Two new Playbuilder sites now provide accessible, high-quality, stimulating and safe play opportunities that fit the City's environment and meet the needs of its users.

### **The Cass Children's Centre**

55. The Cass Children's Centre, based in the City's primary school, is another example which demonstrates excellent, collective effort from well-coordinated multi-agency partnerships. In this instance the benefits are seen in the secure and efficient transfer of data, involving seven other authorities. Highly skilled professionals from a range of agencies make up a fully integrated team at the Centre, which forges strong and effective relationships with parents and children. The team achieves this success through outreach work, on-site counselling and an extensive range of parenting programmes.
56. Effective communication between professionals enables multi-agency identification of needs at an early stage. This has resulted in timely and successful interventions based on flexible, personalised support for both children and their families. Target-setting and robust multi-agency monitoring of progress secure value for money and outcomes that are well above those found elsewhere.

## Kensington and Chelsea: high aspirations, small gaps

### Context and background

57. Kensington and Chelsea is the second smallest but most densely populated local authority in the United Kingdom. It has a diverse and growing population. Almost half of school-age children speak English as an additional language. Although the borough is affluent, this disguises pockets of high deprivation. There is considerable fluidity in the population with some wards experiencing 25% turnover or more from year to year.
58. In Kensington and Chelsea the difference between the performance of children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and others of the same age is consistently smaller than in similar areas and nationally. This is due at least in part to a range of actions which have led to sustained improvement in outcomes for children, young people and families.

### High aspirations

59. Aspirations are very high and there is a strong determination that all children and young people will succeed. This is put into practice by extensive consultation with children, young people and families to identify local need, good use of data and multi-agency management information, and the full commitment of partners to shared priorities. Success is also achieved through the work of the school improvement service; workforce development to increase local knowledge and skills; targeted and personalised multi-agency interventions involving families; and a relentless focus on evaluation and value for money.
60. Resources are used creatively and very effectively. Strong, well-established cross-service and multi-agency partnerships, including those involving voluntary and community groups, are highly successful in delivering ambitious and innovative projects. Effective practice is disseminated very well. These factors are illustrated particularly well in provision for:
- children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
  - children and young people who are looked after
  - those who speak English as an additional language
  - young people of secondary school age from an Irish Traveller heritage.

### Play and the Early Years

61. A wide variety of accessible, high-quality and enriching play opportunities provides a fundamental building block for learning and development. Almost all of this has been judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding. Kensington and Chelsea was one of the first local authorities in the country to publish a play

strategy that was endorsed by children and young people. There are highly successful partnerships between the play service and schools, including breakfast, lunchtime and after-school clubs, holiday schemes and one-to-one learning support from play workers. These all contribute significantly to early intervention, improve attendance and punctuality, and prevent exclusion from school. Effective communication with schools; shared targets for individuals; personalised programmes of support; a highly successful accredited scheme for young volunteers; and work with parents all raise aspirations and help to improve children's achievement. There is also a well-established counselling and play therapy service, which operates a targeted programme to raise the aspirations of disadvantaged children in the more deprived wards.

62. For children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, outcomes have shown significant improvement. The overall aim of Kensington and Chelsea's Children and Young People's Plan is to secure the best start in life for children. Families are seen as crucial to achieving this. The children's workforce is well trained to support families. Work in schools and children's centres, the borough's 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' programmes, and targeted family support are changing approaches and attitudes to parenting. There are also effective parenting programmes for high-need groups, well-supported and successful parenting groups including ones for Sudanese and Somali mothers, and the valuable contributions of lead parenting practitioners. These are each helping to raise aspirations and give parents the confidence and skills to support their child's learning and development.
63. The Early Years Service has been working with parents to engage them as their child's first teacher. For example, it has run fathers' groups on Saturday mornings at children's centres, providing support and advice for them on how best to play with their children. The Early Years Service has also helped to establish a project that involves five schools in North Kensington which has looked at social circumstances as obstacles to raising standards. It became clear that, for example, housing and poor health reduced children's concentration, learning and overall life chances. The service has therefore aligned family support workers with schools in order to liaise with children's social care services and housing. This has made a difference, for instance through an increased understanding by the housing department that their allocations to temporary or permanent accommodation can have a significant effect on children's schooling. Child and adolescent mental health professionals are also now aligned with individual schools. This has helped teachers to identify children with underlying mental health problems and to plan appropriately for their learning.

### **Looked after children**

64. Local success in placement stability stems in part from a Placement Disruption project that uses lessons learnt to influence placement planning. There is also a

contracted service that offers therapeutic support and intervention to children and young people whose placements are unstable. Kensington and Chelsea has set up a project that is targeted specifically at children and young people who require extra support to participate fully in their reviews. This has been developed by an Advocacy and Listening officer.

65. Outcomes for looked after children have shown significant improvement, with greatly improved GCSE results, big reductions in absence and fixed-term exclusions, and an increase in those who are in education, employment or training post-16. The number of children and young people in the care of the local authority has been reduced through effective multi-agency work, which has prevented family breakdown. This reduction has allowed funding that was previously allocated to placement costs to be reinvested in a range of successful initiatives.
66. The virtual school, with its combination of multi-agency partnerships and emphasis on individualised programmes has raised expectations and motivated young people to continue in learning. The aspirations, self-esteem and achievement of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people have improved through supplementary school activities. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities in schools includes the 'Carmen Inspire' project, which has motivated young people to participate in opera and classical music. Residential weekends target young people with individual needs such as those having substance misuse problems.
67. Training on parenting, homework and the use of the internet for children and carers supports learning at home. Residential staff are included in this training. The local authority provides funding for teaching assistants to support young people at risk of exclusion and for personal tuition and support from youth workers. There is also a wide range of mentoring arrangements, including from care leavers and an elected member. All of these approaches contribute to raised attainment and an increased number of applications to university.

### **English as an additional language**

68. Children and young people who speak English as an additional language achieve very well in school. High aspirations and a clear range of opportunities have closed potential gaps in attainment. Success is achieved by effective curriculum provision and through innovative, well-focused school-based research projects. Kensington and Chelsea local authority provides accredited courses and programmes, such as a 10-day orientation programme for secondary-aged students and a one-year course to prepare students aged 14 to 16 who have had limited or disrupted schooling and who are new to English language and literacy at GCSE. A 'Study Clinic' supports the language, learning and personal development of minority ethnic and refugee students aged 16 to 19 who are aiming for a university place.

## **Pupils from a Traveller heritage**

69. Multi-agency partnerships have been very successful in dealing with the social and educational inequalities of pupils from Irish Traveller backgrounds. Partnerships have established alternative educational provision at a local youth club for secondary-aged pupils who are out of school.
70. Support for parents, personalised education plans to help with progress and recreation opportunities have all helped to raise the young people's expectations and re-engage them in learning. The local authority also organises forums for practitioners to build effective networks. These have influenced strategy and disseminated effective practice.

## **Kingston upon Thames: achieving and maintaining high performance**

### **Context and background**

71. Kingston upon Thames is a London borough which covers an affluent area that is ranked as the third least deprived in the city. Despite its overall affluence the borough has pockets of relative poverty, disadvantage and underachievement and some wards are among the 20% most deprived in the country. Although only 20% of the population are from a minority ethnic background, which is significantly lower than the percentage for London as a whole, the proportion rises to 34% in schools. High overall achievement in the borough brings the disadvantages that some children face into sharp focus and presents the local authority and its partners with particular challenges that often result in detailed work with individual children and their families.

### **In pursuit of improvement for all children**

72. The borough is relentless in its pursuit of improvement. It is firmly of the belief that 'satisfactory is not good enough' and that every child 'has the right to succeed, access the best support and attend a good school'. Central to the borough's approach to improvement is the early identification of potential concerns relating to institutions, services and individual children and young people. This is true from the perspective of both children's social care and safeguarding and of their learning.
73. In the area of social care and safeguarding, services are vigilant, share information well and are focused continually on the needs of individual children. Key professionals such as the police, health services and teachers work together very effectively to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded. This results in effective support for vulnerable children and families. For example, senior managers have tackled the doubling in the last two years of the number of initial assessments and the number of children

subject to a protection plan by providing direct and visible support, additional social work posts, and a good workforce development plan.

74. In the case of schools, performance is reviewed carefully, making good use of data and local intelligence. Even when a school has been judged by Ofsted as satisfactory, the local authority prioritises support if the school is not making enough improvement. In these circumstances, school improvement partners work well with headteachers to identify what needs to be done. Detailed action plans are prepared and they are moderated externally. Progress in implementing the plans is reviewed carefully each term by a panel chaired by the Director of Children's Services. The direct involvement of the Director clearly signals the importance with which the borough views the performance of individual institutions and settings and its commitment to achieving high standards.
75. Good progress has been made within early years provision. Not only have overall standards within the Early Years Foundation Stage improved by seven percentage points in the past three years, but also the achievement gap between the most disadvantaged five-year-olds and the rest of the population has narrowed. The take-up of Early Education by families of disadvantaged young children has also improved.
76. This pattern of good performance by both the majority of children and by those who are more vulnerable is repeated within the school sector. A large majority of schools are good or better and no schools are judged by Ofsted as inadequate. The exclusion rate is low and attendance at school is excellent. Attainment is consistently high at Key Stages 2 and 4. For example, in 2009 the percentage of students achieving five A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, increased by 4.5 percentage points. This compared well with a one point increase by statistical neighbours and two points nationally. At the same time, a greater proportion of those eligible for free school meals achieved five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics than nationally. This pattern has been consistent over the past four years. Similarly, the attainment level of young people with special educational needs at Key Stage 4 has been higher each year in Kingston upon Thames than the average for England during the same period.
77. Secondary schools have recognised the need for cross-borough activity for maintaining high standards and have set themselves up as a borough-wide collaborative, working with children's services staff. For example, although rates of participation in post-16 education and training are high and the number of young people who are not in education, training or work is low, schools continue to strive for further improvement. As one response, the collaborative has developed the Anstee Bridge project. This project has been successful in securing alternative provision, including college placements, for vulnerable pupils at risk of dropping out of school in their last two years. The Integrated

Youth Service has also made sure that the coordination of services for young people with a variety of needs is effective. All the young people aged 14 to 16 who completed attendance in alternative provision achieved accredited outcomes in 2008 and 2009.

### Local partnership

78. The Kingston upon Thames Children's Trust views local partnership and multi-agency working as crucial for improving and maintaining high performance in the contexts of both education and social care. Together, partners have developed a detailed understanding of the needs of individual children, families and communities. There is an agreed and widely understood strategy for sharing information. The Common Assessment Framework is well established; clear support is available through early, multi-agency intervention and prevention.<sup>3</sup> Eighty per cent of children who are below statutory thresholds currently receive an initial assessment within 15 days, with a multi-agency meeting arranged within six weeks of the completion of an assessment. A lead professional supports each of these children and young people with clear targets for improvement.<sup>4</sup>
79. Kingston upon Thames has made good progress in using information and communication technology (ICT) to support the delivery of services and ensure that well-defined performance management, information sharing and reporting systems are in place. All key service developments are being supported by the introduction of appropriate integrated ICT systems. These are used to continue to improve practice and performance management, for example in the Integrated Service for Disabled Children, at children's centres and for the Integrated Youth Support Services.
80. ICT is also an important component of Kingston upon Thames's service for identifying and supporting children with additional needs, known as Advancing Services for Kingston Kids (ASKK). It is used to improve the recording of children's needs as part of the Common Assessment Framework. All children and young people who are identified as having significant additional needs are provided with a support package, which includes support for parents. This service is focused on the needs of the family. Intelligence collected through ASKK is used to identify emerging concerns with individual children at an early stage, to obtain support from different services and to ensure that it is properly targeted.

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<sup>3</sup> The Common Assessment Framework is a standardised approach to conducting assessments of children's additional needs and deciding how these should be met.

[www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/deliveringservices1/caf/cafframework/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/deliveringservices1/caf/cafframework/)

<sup>4</sup> A lead professional acts as a single point of contact for a child and her or his family when a range of services is involved and takes the lead in coordinating provision.

81. The Trust Board has configured services on an area or 'locality' basis to support more effective, early intervention. Schools and services located within different geographical areas of the borough work together through four local clusters. They prioritise improvements, commission services and are instrumental in forging excellent partnership working and in achieving borough priorities at the local level.
82. A central hub for information sharing and referral works closely with the clusters to broker multi-agency packages of help for vulnerable children and their families. Highly detailed needs analyses are carried out annually for each of the four clusters and are used consistently to promote improvement for individual children and institutions. The clusters provide a network of services through children's centres and extended schools, working with multi-agency teams of professionals in health, social care and education. An example of this is the drama therapy support which is provided through the cluster arrangements. Data from the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School Rating Scale are used to identify children with social and emotional difficulties and to target support. These data are shared across the Children's Trust in order to influence the commissioning of new services. As a result, drama therapy has been provided for children of primary and secondary age. This has been successful in changing attitudes, building self-confidence and helping young people to be more prepared for work. Similarly, a system called CASPER has enabled the achievements and progress made by pupils with special educational needs to be tracked and benchmarked against similar groups nationally.

## **Lewisham: raising the aspirations of young Black people**

### **Context and background**

83. Lewisham is the second largest inner-London borough and is home to approximately 255,000 people. It also has the second largest child population of all inner-London boroughs. There are 35,800 pupils in 91 schools; 40% of residents and 72% of the school population are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Over 170 different languages are spoken by pupils in Lewisham schools; 22,000 children in the borough live in one-parent families (the seventh highest rate in England and Wales) and 5,000 in step-families. Lewisham is facing increased levels of deprivation.

### **The Black Pupil Achievement Programme**

84. The Black Pupil Achievement Programme (BPAP) was introduced in Lewisham in 2006. Its main objective was to improve educational outcomes and close achievement gaps. This continues to be a key focus for all of Lewisham's strategies and plans, such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan 2009–12.

85. The local authority identified that GCSE results for Black Caribbean young people, especially boys, were poor compared with other groups in Lewisham. Initially, 200 Black Caribbean pupils in Years 8 and 9 were chosen for the programme. These pupils had the potential for academic success but were likely to need support to achieve five good GCSEs.
86. Lewisham calls each group of young people on the programme the 'lens' group, because practitioners and professionals can use them to shine a light on current practice for all pupils. The programme focuses on specific young people, but the results from it help to change systems for all Lewisham pupils.
87. The BPAP programme is individual to each school; each pupil's experience of the programme is also personalised. Shared characteristics of the programme include group support work and individual mentoring. There is a relentless focus on academic achievement and improving life chances. Each pupil knows her or his personal targets and is supported to achieve them.
88. A key element of the programme focuses on the 'learning triangle' between the school, parent and pupil. Family workshops and events help parents to understand and contribute to their children's learning. For example, the local authority arranged science events for pupils, parents and teachers, following consultation with parents who form part of the Revealing Success forum. This is a community forum, set up with the principal aim of enhancing home-school relationships.
89. The employment of two project managers has ensured that the programme has a high profile. The latest data are shared and scrutinised regularly with partners. The programme has made a positive difference to outcomes for pupils in lens groups in each school. It has also been used more widely as a method to improve standards and is now a key strand of the 'Lewisham Challenge' programme, which includes other groups of pupils at risk of underachieving: looked after children and pupils in receipt of free school meals. Primary schools have recently begun to take part in the programme, with lens groups being set up in Years 5 and 6, as well as Years 10 and 11. A primary headteacher has been seconded to develop this work.
90. The momentum for the programme has been sustained by involving the whole community in line with Lewisham's ethos 'It's everybody's business'. Children and young people, parents, local authority officers, teachers and headteachers have contributed through conferences, networks, forums and the Equalities and Achievement Open Lecture Series. School improvement partners discuss the progress of the programme with headteachers, and local authority secondary consultants are champions for it in schools. The importance of overcoming barriers and keeping children's needs at the centre of decisions has been discussed by the Local Strategic Partnership, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and in other meetings with health and social care professionals.

91. The words of pupils who have been part of the programme since 2006 and are now looking forward to going to university in October 2010 illustrate how they feel they have benefited. One said: 'Through the BPAP, I gained more confidence, structure and alternative ways of handling situations, which in turn helped me to achieve good exam results.' Another said: 'I enjoyed being part of the BPAP programme and the opportunities it gave me. I was able to develop my confidence in public speaking and develop my creative side. I am personally excited to see how the programme develops.'
92. Some of the pupils from the 2006 lens group are now trained as 'pupil ambassadors' for the programme. In 2009, 13 pupils across the authority were recruited as ambassadors to ensure that young people have a voice within the programme. The ambassadors co-hosted the fourth annual BPAP achievement event in 2010, bringing together young people, teachers, parents, and local authority officers. Over 500 people attended, demonstrating the interest that the programme has gathered since its inception. Ambassadors have also presented their experiences of secondary schools at a school improvement team day and attended BPAP network meetings. The first Lewisham pupil ambassadors have now recruited young people from Years 11 and 12 to continue their work.
93. The pupil ambassador role is still evolving, but the young people's desire to be involved with the programme is clear:
- 'As a Lewisham ambassador, I feel a sense of pride. It is invigorating to work with academic professionals and stimulating to attend the open lectures. I feel I am breaking the mould and defying stereotypes in terms of age and colour. I would recommend this post to anyone leaving school as it is beneficial, not in terms of references, but for the experience, the understanding of the school network and helping the borough hear and take notice of your views. I believe this job gives a young person something to do in which they learn about themselves and learn from a wonderful group of people.'
94. Key to the success of the programme is the rigorous monitoring of each named pupil's achievement and attainment. This includes regular feedback to parents, who are strongly encouraged to take part in their child's educational experience. In 2008, 55% of the young people who participated in the programme achieved at least five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with 45.5% for all Lewisham pupils. By comparison, when the programme started in 2006, 33% of Black pupils in Lewisham gained five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics. In one school, Northbrook CE School, which started a year after the other schools, 78.5% of pupils on the programme gained five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, in 2009.

95. Secondary schools exchange data and compare the progress of lens groups, which leads to challenging conversations and creative thinking. School cluster groups are also using the information to share good practice and encourage improvement. Lewisham has set up other projects which are based on the concept of the lens group. These include one which is targeting pupils in receipt of free school meals in the Downham and Bellingham areas of the borough and a virtual A\* academy for gifted and talented young people, in which undergraduates from local higher education institutions are working with pupils and parents as learning mentors.
96. The main achievement of the programme has been in raising the aspirations of Black Caribbean young people, their families, teachers and other professionals. The change has taken place at every level within the community. The extension of the programme will be more challenging as a greater number of children and young people with lower expectations of success are helped to achieve. Children's services in Lewisham do not refer to 'narrowing the gap'; the ambition is to eliminate gaps: 'If we succeed, gaps will close.'
97. An assistant headteacher in a secondary school said:
- 'Suddenly everybody was discussing Black attainment and success which in turn led to a sharp improvement in the approach and work ethic of most Year 9s. Following an event we organised to bring parents, pupils and teachers together, bonds were forged and the message was clear to all students: this programme shows that the policymakers care about your achievement, your school believes in your potential and will engage the support of your parents; all you have to do is believe in yourself to ensure your success!'

## **Richmond upon Thames: focusing on the needs of individuals and vulnerable groups**

### **Context and background**

98. The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is a prosperous area with river frontage of over 21 miles, renowned parks and tourist attractions. The borough is the most affluent and one of the least ethnically diverse in London. However, borough-wide figures mask considerable variation across geographical areas. Children and young people make up a lower proportion than average of the population, although the birth rate is increasing. Whereas average income is significantly higher than elsewhere, parts of the borough fall into the 10% most deprived parts of the country.

### **Focus on the needs of all children**

99. The borough is committed to improving or maintaining the good or outstanding outcomes it achieves for children and young people in most aspects of its

services. Despite high performance in many areas, leaders are not complacent and are determined in their endeavours to focus on poor practice and underachievement. Local needs are analysed systematically and in detail, which results in six to eight clearly identified annual priorities for improvement. These priorities are broken down carefully, which further enables partners to focus clearly on the progress and development of the individual children and young people who need support the most. Senior managers' responsibilities for achieving improvements are clear, with institutions and services working to a common purpose to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups. The approach has enabled the local authority and its partners to develop a detailed understanding of local children, families and communities. A large number of performance measures have been developed, including over 80 local indicators, to help to monitor progress in responding to specific needs.

### **Integrating services to meet local needs**

100. Central to Richmond upon Thames's success is its focus on local geographical areas of the borough and the needs of individual children and young people in those areas. The borough is arranged in five areas, known as 'quindrats', with services grouped in each of them to develop and provide localised services for children and families. Each quindrat has a strong focus on preventative services and on the provision of integrated support for children and young people by multi-agency teams. Extended school services in these different areas are organised by coordinators for whom this is their sole responsibility. Quindrat commissioning boards have devolved budgets to buy additional services and thus target resources to agreed local needs.
101. The response of services to local needs is exemplified by the way Richmond has developed support for young Travellers in Hampton. Following consultation with local partners on what provision would be best for young Travellers, a new weekly service was established in a local community centre. Youth workers built up trust with the parents of the young Travellers, talking to them about their needs and concerns, and adapting the local youth programme to reflect those needs. This was taken forward by local contacts in the area, such as the community development worker and the education support worker, who discussed the available provision with Traveller parents.
102. Sixteen young Travellers in Richmond have already participated in the project and enjoyed problem-solving activities, creative arts, issue-based discussions, workshops, a fashion project and fundraising for their activities. Other young people from the local community who attend the Hampton Youth Centre have welcomed the young Travellers. There have been opportunities for young Travellers and other local young people to participate jointly in some activities, and learn about each other's background. This has helped to develop an appreciation of diversity and a greater tolerance for other cultures.

103. The Richmond Integrated Service for Children with Additional Needs panel is a further example of the focus on the needs of individual children and their parents. The panel was established so that different services for disabled children would operate in a joined-up way, reducing the number of individual referrals from different agencies and replacing multiple assessments by each agency with one joint assessment. The process has helped to reduce duplication, speed up assessment for children and embed integrated working across different agencies. Services represented on the panel have included speech therapy, paediatrics and community nursing. Children and their families in Richmond now receive a quicker and more effective service from practitioners with fewer appointments. Families no longer have to tell their story many times to different people.

### **Effective partnership working**

104. Effective partnership working across all agencies, including the police child abuse investigation team, results in timely and planned action to protect children and young people. Management information is comprehensive and used effectively at all levels of the local authority, the Children's Trust and Local Safeguarding Children Boards to monitor performance and drive forward the redesign and improvement of services. The improvement in outcomes for children looked after by the local authority also illustrates the effectiveness of multi-agency working in tackling the needs of individual children and young people. Richmond's looked after children team includes education, health and substance misuse specialists, as well as education psychologists and Connexions personal advisers. Education surgeries help to identify the specific needs of individuals, which leads to targeted and coordinated support across these services. Social workers are well supported, communication is effective and the result is good staff morale.

105. Effective partnership working for looked after children and young people in the local authority extends beyond the work of the professionals directly involved. Corporate parenting is a high priority for elected members and for local authority officers at all levels. The views of children and young people in care are listened to carefully and acted on. The Children in Care Council brings together looked after children and young people leaving care with local authority members and senior managers, including the Lead Member for Children's Services and Education and the Director of Children's Services and Culture. The Children in Care Council is a forum at which young people can talk directly to decision-makers and influence the services provided for them. The young people involved in the work of the Children in Care Council have grown in confidence and have clear ideas about the work that they want the local authority to undertake.

106. For example, young people on the Children in Care Council have provided sound advice on how to make supervised contact more acceptable to children

and young people. They provide a peer mentoring service and help children and young people in care to understand their rights and entitlements. Their views directly influenced the development of Richmond's Children and Young People's Plan. The Children in Care Council is increasingly taking responsibility for making decisions about how the budgets for children in care and for young people leaving care should be spent.

107. Richmond and its partners do not consider that their progress is due to the introduction of approaches that are very different from those found elsewhere, but that it reflects their focus on a small number of priorities and a strong emphasis on integrated working. Services for children are clear about what they want to improve, how they will do it and how they will measure success.

## **Tower Hamlets: raising community understanding about safeguarding**

### **Context and background**

108. Tower Hamlets is a geographically small, but densely populated inner-London borough. Half of Tower Hamlets residents are from minority ethnic communities. More than a third of the population comes from a Bangladeshi background. There is a long-established history of new communities arriving in the borough. Somalis are now the second largest minority ethnic group and this community continues to grow.
109. Immense wealth sits side by side with significant poverty in Tower Hamlets. While the continued development of Canary Wharf has brought much needed economic growth, unemployment is high and many children live in poverty. All the wards are among the most deprived 10% nationally and the proportion of children eligible for free school meals exceeds 50% at both primary and secondary school.
110. Religion plays an important part in the life and culture of many residents in the borough. There are almost 50 registered mosques in Tower Hamlets which provide services to the community and eight madrassahs offering full-time Islamic education. In addition, many individual teachers provide Islamic teaching in families' homes. There are also more than 60 different African churches in Tower Hamlets. There is no diocesan structure and these churches operate independently of each other.
111. Tower Hamlets Local Safeguarding Children Board has two different sub-groups working with Muslim and African families. Although there is a common need to raise awareness and increase understanding of safeguarding issues, the Board has found that a different approach is needed in each of the religious communities.

## Understanding the safeguarding needs of the Muslim community

112. Five years ago Tower Hamlets was receiving allegations from the Muslim community about the behaviour of local Imams and Arabic teachers, particularly about their use of physical chastisement, when teaching children and young people. Approximately six to 10 allegations of inappropriate behaviour were being reported each week. As a response, the post of Muslim Children's Safeguarding Coordinator was created in the children's social care team.
113. A key task of the person appointed as the coordinator was to work with the mosques and madrassahs in the borough to raise their awareness of safeguarding and their responsibilities in this area. The coordinator visited each mosque and madrassah, set up child protection training for the management committees and aimed to ensure that each mosque and madrassah had child protection policies and procedures. When working with the management committees, the coordinator brought together good social work practice with an understanding of Islam to show how the teachings of the Qu'ran underpinned responsibilities in relation to child protection and safer recruitment. Good working relationships were also established with the Association of Islamic Teachers to make sure that Arabic teachers received child protection training.
114. The local Muslim community has been very responsive and appreciative of the support offered by the local authority. The Council of Mosques and Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Board jointly produced 'Guidance for Mosques and Madrassahs: Safeguarding Children'. There has been a significant fall in allegations against Imams and Arabic teachers within the last two years, including a period of 10 months when no allegation was made.
115. The Muslim Children's Safeguarding Coordinator has built on this success and organised multi-agency seminars in conjunction with the London Mosque to begin a dialogue with the Muslim community about other sensitive issues which have a bearing on the safety of children and young people. These include sessions on mental health, self-harm and domestic violence. The seminars were initially for the Imams and community leaders but attendance has broadened to include parents, who now make up approximately 70% of the audience.
116. As a result of these seminars it has been accepted that domestic violence is an issue to be tackled. The first domestic violence perpetrators course is currently taking place. Seminars for parents on issues such as how to choose an Arabic teacher, the use of physical chastisement, circumcision and the sexual exploitation of girls have been arranged in conjunction with mainstream schools in the borough. Key to all the work with the Muslim community is the bringing together of social work practice with Islamic understanding, demonstrating how the teachings of the Qur'an underpin the need to keep children safe.

117. As a result of increased understanding by children's social care staff, there has been a change in practice when working with Bangladeshi girls at risk of sexual exploitation. Social care staff have realised that by taking the girls into care, they were making them more vulnerable to other risks. More preventative and early intervention work has now been put in place with families, providing greater support for them. This change has reduced the number of girls that the borough is dealing with.

### **Understanding the needs of African families**

118. Some African parents entrust their children to the care of a relative living in England, so that the children can escape the poverty of parts of Africa. There are relatively high levels of private fostering arrangements within African families in Tower Hamlets.

119. Alongside the Somali community, there is also a significant Nigerian community. As the number of cases referred to social care and health for support from the child and adolescent mental health service began to increase, the African Family Service was set up in the borough. This service has become involved with Christian places of worship because, as with the Muslim community, allegations of child abuse were being made against members of the churches. Sometimes within parts of the African community there is a belief that an evil force has entered a child and is controlling them. Abuse to the child can occur when they are exorcised of this evil spirit.

120. The African Family Service is sensitive in its approach to raising community awareness of safeguarding issues. It also supports statutory services in the borough to understand the needs of the growing African community. Group meetings take place for pastors every six weeks and act as a forum in which understanding about child protection can be increased. In March 2009 'Guidance for Christian places of worship: Safeguarding Children' was published, setting out the responsibilities of places of worship. This guidance has been disseminated within the local African community.

121. Every six months community seminars are held with pastors, voluntary organisations working with the African community and service users. These seminars provide an opportunity for African Family Service staff to listen to the concerns of the community. They have also resulted in identifying around 90 children who were being privately fostered.

122. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that aspects of race, religion or culture do not mask child abuse issues if they are encountered by staff providing health, education, welfare or social care services in the course of their work. Teams in education, health and social care have a designated African Family worker to whom they can turn for advice. Every four weeks the different agencies bring cases to the African Family Service for consideration and receive

recommendations on the next steps to be taken. These may involve joint visits with a worker from one of the statutory services.

## **Wandsworth: multi-agency work to improve early years outcomes**

### **Context and background**

123. Wandsworth is the largest inner-London borough. Over a third of the area is in the 25% most deprived areas nationally and contrasts starkly with affluent parts of the borough. Children and young people make up 18% of the population and the proportion is increasing quickly due to births and migration. Twenty eight per cent of all dependent children and young people live in lone parent families. The population is ethnically diverse. Over 65% of pupils in maintained secondary schools and 59% of pupils in maintained primary schools are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

### **Focus on early years**

124. The local authority and its partners share a commitment to improving outcomes for children, especially in ensuring that they make good progress during their early years. Locality-based multi-agency working covering health, care and development, a shared understanding of data and priorities, and early detection of children's needs has proved to be key in improving outcomes. Joint work involving the police and health professionals is effective in implementing safeguarding arrangements and results in timely action to protect children. As a result of early intervention, repeat referrals to social care services are consistently lower than for similar local authorities.

125. A well-established Early Years Partnership views parents as the child's most important educator and in turn challenges the work of partners well. For example, the Early Years Partnership was very effective in ensuring that the needs of parents with young babies are recognised as a key area of focus in the borough's Early Years Outcomes duty plan.

126. Partners have built well on early progress made through Sure Start local programmes in Roehampton and Battersea and children's centres are very successful in working with children and families. Highly effective multi-agency engagement with health visitors ensures that parents make good use of children's centres, initially in the most deprived areas, and it is enabling a timely response to needs. Parents are encouraged well to express their views and needs and this leads to improvements in services. For example, they asked for more information about post-natal health services and this has resulted in earlier intervention and support.

127. Some of the borough's initial work in introducing the Common Assessment Framework was undertaken by the Early Years Service. The framework is now

well established in the area and is used effectively for planning and agreeing packages of support with the parents and lead professionals. As part of developing the use of the Common Assessment Framework, the local authority established Early Years Multi-Agency Panels. These meet every two weeks throughout the year to consider assessment information on young children, to plan support and identify lead professionals. A handbook, approved by the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Board, explains the role of the panels and ensures consistency of approach in how they work.

128. As part of the first phase of Wandsworth's Early Years review, 16 Sure Start centres were established. One of these, Waverton Children's Centre, is a specialist centre for children with special needs and/or disabilities. There are also multi-disciplinary assessment services and a home teaching service for this group of children. The second phase of the local authority's Early Years review focused in part on services for children under five with special needs and/or disabilities. As a result of the review, Wandsworth recognised that, despite much improvement in these services, further development was needed. Consequently, during 2008–09 the Early Years Service changed its approach to multi-disciplinary assessment of special educational needs. Assessments are now conducted in the settings that are the most familiar to the children. As a consequence of this work, Wandsworth is implementing an Early Years Programme for families with young children with special needs and/or disabilities.
129. Over recent years progress has been made in improving outcomes through the Early Years programme in more disadvantaged areas and with children that need the most support. Between 2007 and 2009, the proportion of children in Battersea achieving 6 points or above on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for both personal and social education and for communication, language and literacy improved by 14 percentage points for the 30% most deprived areas receiving support, compared with a rise of four percentage points for the rest of the area. In Roehampton, over a three-year period there has been a significant narrowing of the gap between the areas supported by Sure Start and the more affluent areas, which were not receiving the support.
130. Wandsworth encourages the involvement of parents and partners not only through the Early Years Partnership but also through three Locality Reference Groups, alongside more informal forums. The Locality Reference Groups meet quarterly and are attended by the Head of Early Years and by other senior local authority officers. Information on the progress of services is presented clearly so that it can be followed by everyone present. Parents play an active part in determining what needs to be done and in holding services to account. Partners and parents all contribute to consultation exercises in order to improve outcomes and to identify areas for further progress. For example, consultation on equality impact assessments showed that Somali families needed more

support and differentiated approaches were developed to engage particular groups such as Tamil parents.

131. Wide-ranging strategies have been developed for working with parents and their children. Locality teachers are provided by maintained nurseries from school-based children's centres. They work directly with families to increase parents' confidence about and understanding of their impact on their child's learning and development. Schemes such as Share Family Learn help parents to become more involved. Accredited volunteering programmes for parents of children at risk of poor attainment are succeeding in improving their own confidence and in increasing their participation in their children's learning.
132. The locality teachers also work with partners from different agencies to ensure a consistent approach. Speech and language therapists help parents to establish language from birth. This is an approach which the Early Years Service built on in establishing its 'Every Child a Talker' programme, which has a focus on the family as well as the setting. Training and advisory support in the Early Years Foundation Stage are designed carefully to integrate curriculum and welfare priorities, recognising the wide-ranging factors which affect children's development and learning.

### **Use of data**

133. Partners' understanding of local needs and in particular the needs of vulnerable and underachieving groups has been paramount in driving up standards. This understanding has been based on a balance between the continuing dialogue with the users of services and an exhaustive analysis of early years data. The local authority provides a baseline of data for localities and children's centres to help them to plan services for families. Data are used well to help practitioners recognise the priorities for improvement.
134. An Early Years Data Group supports service development and updates its methodologies in response to changing requirements. Partners emphasise the need for increasingly sophisticated levels of analysis to maintain improvement, as the gaps in performance between different groups narrow. A dedicated researcher has been found to be fundamental to this approach in order to ensure that there is a keen focus on outcomes across all the services that young children and their families use from birth to the age of five.

### **Performance management**

135. Progress on the performance management framework operates at three broad levels:
  - productivity, measured through database tools such as eStart
  - evaluation, through asking participants about the difference that services have made

- outcomes, provided by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
136. Low expectations are challenged, for example through an early years moderation process. Managers of settings have found that 'mock' inspections are a beneficial strategy for continuing to raise performance, even asking for them to be unannounced. This illustrates Wandsworth's continuing determination to improve performance even further within the early years.

## **York: closing the gap for low-income families**

### **Context and background**

137. York local authority comprises the urban centre of the city and a number of small rural villages. It is a unitary authority with 10 secondary schools. It is relatively affluent, although there are pockets of deprivation. The largest minority ethnic category is 'White Other' which includes people of Turkish, Kurdish, Eastern European and Traveller/Gypsy background.
138. Within its children's services, there is a very good record of above-average educational attainment in schools and settings. The high quality of the school improvement and staff development service is recognised in York's Beacon status. Elected members, officers and all local partners share a commitment to children and young people as York's future. A current focus is on narrowing the gap in achievement of those from low-income families, as these young people have tended not only to do less well than their peers at the age of 16 but also to have low aspirations when considering options for the future.
139. Effective local action is underpinned by strong partnership working, detailed analysis of performance and the needs of individual schools and their pupils, and robust challenge and mature implementation of national initiatives.

### **Raising the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals**

140. Detailed and local performance data highlighted outcomes for those eligible for free school meals as an area of underperformance in York. This information was analysed thoroughly by the school improvement and staff development service and was scrutinised by elected members. Consultation with all the secondary school headteachers led to agreement that each school would set performance targets and take action to improve outcomes across the city for pupils entitled to free school meals.
141. Some underachieving pupils have benefited from developments which have become available for all young people. For example, York was successful in obtaining approval for all its Diploma courses and 25% of students are now following these courses. York has introduced foundation learning with the aim that 100% of students should attain level 2. This increased range of alternative

courses has contributed to greater success for some young people who might otherwise have become disengaged.

142. The local authority has worked closely with specific schools to develop tailor-made interventions. A focus on teaching and learning, the development of the curriculum, foundation learning, multiple accreditation routes and robust pupil tracking have all had a significant impact on raising the attainment of those who are eligible for free school meals. Pupils are selecting courses best suited to their needs and interests.
143. As a result, outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals in York have begun to buck the national trend, as in the case of York High School (described below). However, this success did not satisfy the concern of schools to improve the life chances of young people at 19. Increasing numbers of the target group were attaining level 2 qualifications but did not necessarily have the aspiration to apply their skills in new and challenging settings or the world of work.
144. The local authority, schools and voluntary groups are therefore working together to challenge these low aspirations through targeted parenting programmes, transition projects and a community partnership project. The latter is a cross-directorate project which is focused on raising aspirations in local communities. Closely linked to the Safer Community Strategy, the project aims to develop skills and aspirations so that every child and young person in York 'can reach their full potential and live their dreams'. Local services are developing advice and guidance for families and communities on how they can work together to overcome barriers. Schools are extending their contribution through opportunities for family learning and the local authority is supporting headteachers in the development of community leadership skills. Innovative local community events have been incorporated within the strategic plan.

### **Raising performance in an individual school**

145. York High School is an 11–16 secondary school with approximately 900 pupils. It opened on a split site in September 2007 following York City's reorganisation of secondary education in the west of the city. Attainment in its two predecessor schools was well below the averages in York and nationally; one of the schools had been placed in a category of concern by Ofsted. York High School serves the area of the greatest social and economic deprivation in the local authority. It has a higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than the national average and 25% of the pupils also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. During 2008, the school had to cope with an additional challenge when a serious fire caused significant disruption.
146. After the school opened, the local authority established a support plan to ensure that resources were closely aligned to the school's improvement priorities. York's teaching and learning consultants supported the Year 7 programme and provided targeted interventions for Year 11 pupils. After the

fire, to ensure that only minimal teaching time was lost, the local authority worked with the school to find temporary buildings and alternative accommodation. Extra funding was provided, including support for the school's involvement in the Partners for Excellence programme, which has had a significant impact on raising attainment and achievement. The school has introduced alternative curriculum pathways, resulting in a range of accreditation including BTEC and OCR Higher. The school has been developing its teaching and learning through a whole-school, cross-phase focus on literacy and has taken a lead in the community partnership project with the local primary schools.

147. There has been a significant improvement in Key Stage 4 results, both for the school population as a whole and for those eligible for free school meals. Performance in achieving five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics for those eligible for free school meals improved from 36% in 2007 to 46% in 2009.

### **York City's approach**

148. Success in York is built on a number of factors: the willingness of partners to be open about the challenges; to learn from each other and the wider community; to be flexible in deploying resources; and to be confident in selecting and adapting initiatives, both local and national, which have the potential to make the greatest impact on the needs of the city and on individual school communities.