



Joint area review

Rotherham children's services authority area

**Better
education
and care**

Review of services for children and young people

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

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

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

Context

7. Rotherham is a metropolitan borough comprising 110 square miles within the south Yorkshire region. It contains a mix of urban areas and villages, interspersed with large areas of open countryside. Following a significant decline in traditional heavy industries during the 1980s and 1990s, the local area has received regeneration funding and undertaken renewal initiatives in recent years. The area's industrial base has diversified and is now growing rapidly and the percentage of adults in employment currently matches the national average. As a result of such improvements, Rotherham has recently moved from the 48th most deprived to 63rd out of 354 districts in the national index of multiple deprivation. However, inequalities persist, significant areas of deprivation remain and many children face a difficult start in life. Rotherham has higher levels of deprivation than some similar authorities.

8. The largest town is Rotherham, where the major industries and administrative centres are located. The borough's overall population is approximately 252,000, of whom nearly a third are children and young people. The proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups is small and comprises 3.1% overall. Of the children and young people from Rotherham, 7.7% are of minority ethnic origin. They live primarily in two communities. The number of young people of school age is expected to remain stable during the next few years. An increasing number of young people from neighbouring authorities attend Rotherham schools.

9. The council is led by a chief executive with a cabinet style of governance. The council works closely with its partners on an improvement strategy for Rotherham through the local strategic partnership, Rotherham Partnership. The strategy is based on five themes: achieving, learning, alive, safe and proud. It is overseen by a partnership board consisting of the leaders and equivalents from key partner organisations, including the primary care trust (PCT), the police, the Connexions service, the Chamber of Commerce and the voluntary and community sectors.

10. The council moved quickly to establish a children and young people's service with a senior executive director of children and young people's services, lead member for children and young people, and a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), which has been in place since spring 2005. All services within the local authority relating to children and young people were brought together formally from October 2005 and are overseen by a multi-agency leadership team and, at the highest level, the children and young people's board. The

board has recently been reconstituted to make it the main decision-making body and includes key partners. The board plans to evolve into an appropriate trust arrangement by 2008. A Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and Well-Being Strategy was developed in advance of the deadline of April 2006 following a comprehensive audit of need and consultation with children and young people.

11. The council currently maintains 134 schools of which 104 are primary, 16 secondary, seven special and four pupil referral units. The number of children who are looked after by the council is reducing and there are currently 326. South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) works with the local authority, Connexions, colleges and schools to deliver the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by two further education colleges, one sixth form college and 11 schools with sixth forms including three special schools and seven work-based learning providers. Entry to Employment (E2E) is managed by a private organisation, which holds the main contract with South Yorkshire LSC for approximately 170 places and subcontracts aspects of provision to other training providers. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is managed within the Inclusion, Voice and Influence part of the children and young people's service. Most of the provision is subcontracted to schools, colleges, other training providers, and community and voluntary organisations.

12. There are six health providers of services to children in Rotherham. Primary care for children in Rotherham is mainly provided by the Rotherham PCT, which is coterminous with the council's boundaries. Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is the main provider of acute health services. Other children's hospital services and accident and emergency services are mainly provided by Sheffield Children's NHS Trust, which also provides specialist services across the country. The Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Service is served by Rotherham PCT and Doncaster and South Humber Healthcare NHS Trust. Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust provides a small outpatient facility. South Yorkshire NHS Ambulance Trust serves the whole of the borough.

13. There are no young offender institutions in the area.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

14. **Outcomes for the majority of children and young people in Rotherham are good overall.** Children and young people appear safe and those most at risk are well protected. There has been a significant reduction in the number of children on the child protection register and in those entering the looked after system. Much work is undertaken to reduce health inequalities, which relate to economic and social differences across Rotherham, and healthy lifestyles are promoted. They are particularly well promoted by schools through their good work on the National Healthy Schools Programme. Good quality early years and childcare places are available to those who require them. The

educational achievement of children and young people, including vulnerable groups such as children who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is generally improving, often at faster rates than those found nationally. Standards of attainment are satisfactory and generally improving. Children and young people are strongly encouraged to participate in decision-making about their lives and their communities and many have been involved in the development of local priorities for them. The educational achievement of 16–18 year olds taking GCE or VCE AS or A levels is improving and the proportion of young people aged 16–19 entering employment, education or training has risen significantly in the past two years, including those young people who are looked after by the council. The success rates of young people achieving a level 2 qualification at age 19 has been static for the past two years and remains below the national average.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

15. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Children, young people and their parents receive good health information and support, particularly where services are co-located in children's centres. Schools make a valuable contribution to promoting healthy lifestyles through the National Healthy Schools Programme. They all offer good health education, promote healthy eating and provide a good range of physical activities. A number of initiatives have been implemented to promote breastfeeding. Initiatives to reduce teenage pregnancies have resulted in a 9% reduction since 1998. Dental hygiene is promoted well in schools and although the number of young people with dental decay is high, there has been a reduction since 2003. There is an effective multi-agency approach to reducing drug use, smoking and alcohol consumption. Good mental health is positively promoted and access to a wide range of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is available within acceptable timescales. Healthcare for children who are looked after by the council is good. Disabled children, including those with learning difficulties, receive a wide range of specialist services from early years to adulthood. However, waiting times for children and young people needing non-urgent paediatric occupational therapy are too long.

Staying safe

16. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** The council and its partners provide a good range of family advice, support and early prevention services. Children are well protected through good quality child protection procedures and high quality child protection training for staff. There has been a significant reduction in the number of children on the child protection register and in those entering the looked after system. Referrals are dealt with promptly and appropriate steps are taken to safeguard children who are at risk. The quality of initial assessments has improved and is now good, with effective contributions from

agencies. The time taken to complete core assessments has improved and the council is now close to its planned level of improvement. Effective use is made of children in need plans, contributing to low levels of re-referrals to social care and high deregistration and low re-registration rates on the child protection register. Almost all children and young people who are looked after by the council are living in family placements and the majority are allocated a qualified social worker. A small number experience too many changes of social worker. Children who are looked after by the council have access to a very good rights and representation service. The number of available foster carers is too low and the range of placements does not reflect the ethnicity, culture and religions of all children. Children's homes are in need of refurbishment to bring them up all up to national standards. Performance is good in relation to the numbers of children adopted from care. Young people leaving care, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well supported and a higher percentage of them enter education, employment or training than that found nationally. Effective systems are in place for sharing information about, and responding to, children at risk of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and substance misuse. Safe recruitment practices are in place and there are well-established and coordinated arrangements for the management of serious offenders in the community. Bullying is addressed well, but some young people remain concerned about it. Children and young people are supported to report incidents of racial abuse and effective monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that incidents are dealt with.

Enjoying and achieving

17. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good. Early years education and childcare is good. There are enough early years and childcare places to meet the needs of parents and children. Young children are well prepared for school. Almost all children and young people attend school regularly. Most say they enjoy their education and consider they are doing well. Good targeted education services, working in partnership with schools, have had a positive impact on the quality of education provided and pupil achievement in schools in recent years. While standards of attainment are satisfactory, pupils' progress over recent years has often been greater than that found in similar areas and nationally. The majority of children and young people, including vulnerable groups such as children who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make generally better progress than expected, given their starting points. Nevertheless, the council and schools are aware of the need to improve the achievement of some groups of young people, particularly those between the ages of 11 and 14, some of those from minority ethnic communities and boys.

18. Attendance is similar to that found nationally and has improved at a faster rate. Behaviour is generally good and exclusions are low. Children and young people who have been excluded from school receive good alternative educational provision and the majority are returned to mainstream schools

quickly. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who are looked after by the council are supported well and in the main they achieve better than similar groups of children and young people in comparable areas. Increasing numbers of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their needs met in mainstream settings or local special schools without requiring a statement of special educational need. The number of children and young people educated out of the borough is low; this reflects the council's strong inclusion strategy. Children and young people have access to a good range of recreational and voluntary learning opportunities.

19. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good, with some very good features.

Services work well together to ensure that children, young people and their families are helped to develop socially and emotionally and supported to manage challenges in their lives. Key partners, including the voluntary and private sectors, provide targeted support for young people who are most in need; for example, young carers are provided with good opportunities to meet on a regular basis. The service, although valued, is not well used, and more young carers could benefit from the support it offers. Other vulnerable groups of children and young people, including those in families suffering from domestic violence, are also well supported. Children and young people are strongly encouraged to have a voice in decision-making about their lives and the community. The council is committed to consultation with children and young people and has listened to many young people's views to determine the priorities within the CYPP. Effective multi-agency work ensures that young people are targeted and engaged in activities to deter them from anti-social behaviour and prevent offending and re-offending. The majority of young people with mental health problems who offend have good access to mental health services, although 17 and 18 year olds who offend have more difficulty, due to the complexity of the system at this level.

Achieving economic well-being

20. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. A good range of well-coordinated initiatives is provided to improve the skills and employment prospects of families who are most in need. Parental involvement in schools and learning as a means of promoting economic well-being is valued and supported well by schools and the adult and community service. Young people aged 14 to 16 are well prepared for working life and they receive satisfactory careers advice and guidance. Secondary schools provide a good range of work experience opportunities. The majority of young people access a good range of work-related workshops and enterprise activities. Good partnership working exists between different educational institutions to provide a complementary range of educational opportunities and learning pathways to enable the majority of young people over 16 to progress in their education and employment. As a result, the proportion of young people aged 16–19 moving into employment, education or training has improved significantly in the past

two years, including those young people leaving the care of the council. However, too few of those in employment participate in accredited training at work. The educational achievement of 16–18 year olds taking GCE or VCE AS or A levels has risen, but success rates for young people achieving a level 2 qualification at the age of 19 remains below the national average. Despite strong links between individual institutions, organisations and employers, there has sometimes been insufficient strategic action by some key partners to coordinate a full response to the needs of all young people aged 16–19, including young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Young people leaving care receive good advice and support to prepare them for independent adult life including housing, education and training, financial and welfare support. Services and schools work well together to provide effective transitions for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as they move into post-16 education. However, a number leave early.

Service management

21. **The management of services for children and young people is good.** Current capacity is good, as is the capacity to continue to improve. The self-assessment produced by partners provides a good evaluation of the current position in Rotherham as well as their strengths and areas for development. Ambition is good. The council and its partners have set out an ambitious, shared vision and strategy for improving outcomes for children and young people in a single plan for children and young people. The plan is based on a thorough audit of need and links to the higher-level council plans. It is underpinned by robust service and business plans that are focused on delivery. The council has consistently prioritised children and young people, with significant financial investment above government guidelines. Council and key partners' services for children and young people were brought together in October 2005 and are overseen by a multi-agency children's board. Trust arrangements are well on track to be in place by the required time in 2008. The highly regarded director for children and young people's services and lead member for children and young people provide powerful and trusted leadership, ensuring the continued drive for improvement across the service. They are well supported by a multi-agency leadership team.

22. Good budget monitoring, control and planning processes provide a solid basis for realising ambitions. Value for money is good, as are procedures for consistently assuring this. Some budgets are pooled and others are aligned. However, the commissioning strategy is underdeveloped, particularly in terms of services provided by the large voluntary sector. This position is recognised by the children's board. There continues to be significant investment in recruiting, retaining and training staff although the workforce strategy matched to the single plan is still in development. There are some areas where the local area recognises a lack of capacity but has plans in place to address them.

23. A well-established and effective performance management framework is in place across children's services. Very good use is made of data analyses by the leadership team to evaluate performance and to develop strategies for

improvement. Evaluation of progress towards the achievement of priorities is considered in terms of value for money alongside outcomes. Scrutiny is effective.

Grades

Grades awarded: 4: outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	3		
Staying safe	3		
Enjoying and achieving	3		
Making a positive contribution	3		
Achieving economic well-being	3		
Service management	3		
Capacity to improve	3	3	
Children's services		3	
The education service		3	
The social care services for children		3	
The health service for children			3

Recommendations

For immediate action

The council and its partners should:

- improve information and access to services for young carers, so that more young carers can benefit from provision and all relevant agencies understand their needs.

For action over the next six months

The council and its partners should:

- ensure more timely access for non-urgent paediatric occupational therapy cases
- improve the timescales for completing core assessments of children in need
- improve participation rates in post-16 education
- ensure borough-wide post-16 education and training options meet the needs of all young people, including young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and young people who have offended
- reduce the number of changes of social workers for children who are looked after by the council.

For action in the longer term

The council and its partners should:

- ensure voluntary sector provision is part of a wider commissioning strategy
- improve the range of carers who offer placements to children who are looked after by the council so that their varied needs are met.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

24. **Children and young people are generally healthy and outcomes are adequate.** Perinatal mortality in Rotherham is broadly in line with that found in similar areas and national average rates. The percentage of babies with a low birth weight is in line with the national average and improving. Breastfeeding rates are significantly below the national average, but have improved since 2002. First contact with a health visitor for children under the age of five is significantly higher than the national average and all GP surgeries provide effective oversight of children's health. Immunisation rates for infants by their second birthday are in line with national averages although 'booster' rates for five year olds are significantly below. The incidence of measles is reducing although rates remain higher than the national average. The dental health of 11 year olds is improving but remains static for 5 year olds. Admissions to accident and emergency departments due to substance misuse are significantly lower than those in similar areas, and lower than the national average. The waiting times for young people who need to access CAMHS are

good and improving. In the Tellus survey undertaken for this review, a high percentage of children and young people reported feeling quite healthy or very healthy and the local lifestyle survey indicated that 92% of young people participate in regular exercise, with 82% exceeding two hours a week. All schools successfully participate in the National Healthy Schools Programme.

25. **Children and young people in Rotherham appear safe.** The majority of children and young people who responded to the Tellus survey, and those interviewed during the review, said they felt safe. There has been a significant reduction in the incidence of road traffic accidents over recent years but numbers remain above the national average. Effective systems are in place for sharing information about, and responding to, children at risk of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and substance misuse. The number of children on the child protection register is lower than the national average and this has fallen significantly over the last three years. There is a good rate of deregistration from the child protection register. Child protection arrangements are managed well and referrals are dealt with promptly. Responses to child protection referrals relating to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. Local partners take satisfactory action to ensure effective records are kept of children who go missing.

26. The numbers of children who are looked after by the council has reduced significantly and is below national levels. The number of available foster carers is not large enough and this has affected choice and the matching of carers to children's and young people's needs. Children who are identified as needing to be adopted are placed within good timescales. Social work vacancies are low and most young people who are looked after by the council have a qualified worker allocated to their case. However, a small number, whose cases are actively worked with by trainee social workers, have experienced a number of changes of staff when trainees go on placement. Young people leaving care are well supported, have access to safe accommodation and are in regular contact with the leaving care service. Staff recruitment policies and practices are comprehensive and include appropriate statutory checks for those working with children.

27. **Children and young people achieve well.** The quality of early years education and childcare is good and there are enough early years and childcare places to meet the needs of parents. Children are well prepared for school and they make satisfactory progress by the age of seven. Standards of attainment for children and young people aged 11 and 14 are generally in line with those in similar areas and national averages. At 16, standards are in line with similar areas but remain below national averages. However, the rate of improvement in recent years has often been faster than that found in similar areas and national averages across all ages. The majority of children and young people, including vulnerable groups such as children who are looked after by the council and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, generally make better progress than expected, given their starting point. The council and schools are aware that the achievement of some young people between 11 and

14, some from minority ethnic communities and boys needs to improve. Attendance in primary and secondary schools is similar to that found nationally and has improved at a faster rate. The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions is low and there is a high rate of reintegration into mainstream schools following exclusion. There have been no exclusions of children who are looked after by the council since 2004 and their attendance and achievement at school, although low, are improving well and are better than found nationally. Children and young people have access to a good range of enrichment and voluntary learning opportunities, particularly through extended services in schools and youth service activities.

28. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make a good contribution to their communities. Children and young people are involved in a good range of activities that develop their social skills, increase their self-esteem and confidence and helps them take personal responsibility. They are supported well to manage changes and challenges in their lives through the provision of a wide range of support groups where counselling, advice and information are provided. Many, including vulnerable young people, are strongly encouraged to participate in decision-making, for example, on priorities for them in council plans. They are also encouraged to make a positive contribution to their schools and local communities through, for example, the active youth cabinet and volunteering opportunities to become junior park rangers. Work by partners is effectively targeting and identifying young people at risk of anti-social behaviour. The positive activities for young people provided by the youth service promoted activities for over 1,364 young people at risk of anti-social behaviour in 2004/05. There has been a satisfactory reduction in the re-offending rates of young people. While the 24-month re-conviction rates show a slight deterioration in performance, the recent 12-month reconviction data show a marked decrease in re-offending, particularly with regard to those on community penalties. The number of young people who have offended and who are engaged in education, training or employment is lower than the national average, although improving.

29. Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are increasingly well prepared for working life. Good family learning programmes have a positive effect on improved outcomes for parents such as basic skills and literacy and numeracy skills for young people. The average point score for GCE/VCE/A/AS qualifications of young people aged 16–18 has improved significantly since 2003 at a faster rate than the national average and that found in similar areas. Performance is now well above that in similar areas and just below the national average. Since 2004, there has been a significant improvement in the proportion of young people aged 16–19 who enter education, employment or training, including those young people who are looked after by the council. However, not enough of those in employment participate in accredited training at work. The success rates for young people achieving a level 2 qualification at the age of 19 remain below the national average. Most families live in good accommodation, with little use made of bed-

and-breakfast arrangements. Young people leaving care receive good advice and support to find suitable housing and prepare for independent living. There has been a significant increase in the number of families of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receiving direct payments, from 17 in March 2005 to 53 in April 2006.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

30. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Good and effective partnership working exists across local health services, with an effective multi-agency approach to meet the health needs of the majority of children and young people. Health priorities have been identified and service provision configured to meet these needs. Evaluation of individual service intervention and evidence of impact is limited because self-evaluation strategies are in the early stages of development.

31. Good support and advice are available to parents and carers to keep their children healthy. Maternity provision is good and a designated midwife is available for pregnant teenagers. Parents, carers, children and young people can access a good range of health information through children's centres and these provide good examples of the effective multi-agency working within Rotherham. Community midwives are relocating to children's centres to ensure good access to the more traditionally hard-to-reach groups.

32. Breastfeeding is actively promoted through a variety of activities including peer support groups, but rates remain below the national average. The appointment of the breastfeeding coordinator is beginning to have a positive impact. Likewise, despite the fact that dental hygiene is positively promoted in schools and there has been a reduction in recent years, the proportion of young people with dental decay remains above the national average. As a non-fluoridated area, the incidence of tooth decay in Rotherham is lower than in many similar areas. Access to dentists remains an issue for Rotherham, as is often the case nationally.

33. The quality and extent of schools' participation in the National Healthy Schools Programme is a strength. This initiative is having a positive effect on the health and well-being of children and young people in Rotherham. Some Sure Start areas have been particularly effective at promoting healthy living, for example, by engaging vulnerable children in an allotment project where vegetables are grown and sold to the local community.

34. There is an effective multi-agency approach to reducing drug use, smoking and alcohol consumption in children and young people and related emergency admissions are significantly better the national average. Good multidisciplinary working provides a coordinated approach to sex and relationships education with school nurses playing an active part. Drop-in clinics have been set up across Rotherham to ensure easy access to a range of

confidential services and other initiatives have been developed to promote good sexual health and prevent teenage pregnancies such as confidential health advice for teenagers, the Baby Doll Project and Hardware, which provides free condoms. The rate of teenage pregnancies is reducing, particularly for the under-16s.

35. The PCT recognises that more accurate data are required to assess the rates of childhood obesity, but historical data suggest that this is an increasing problem. Rotherham has responded to this by ensuring that schools and youth services promote healthy living through a good range of activities, including sporting opportunities and active lunchtime schemes in schools. Some young people reported that there is good access to after-schools sports activities, school meals are healthier and drinking water is available. A lifestyle survey indicates that 92% of young people participate in regular exercise with 82% exceeding two hours a week. The council has been effective in providing multi-sports activities for Asian girls on a Sunday, which has improved access for this group.

36. Health visiting services are being appropriately targeted at areas of most need. Universal health screening is provided, with specialist staff available to support asylum seekers and the women's refuge. Although there are some good preventive strategies in place, immunisation rates for five year olds remain below the national average. Access to general practice and primary care services are good. Attendances at the accident and emergency department by children and young people are in line with the national average. Waiting times are minimal and there are appropriate, separate facilities for children and young people as well as good paediatric staffing levels.

37. Good mental health is positively promoted and access to a wide range of CAMHS is available within acceptable timescales. There is good access to local inpatient facilities and a focus on prevention has ensured the provision of a range of community services. Out-of-hours services are available and the crisis intervention team supports ward staff. However, there is currently no CAMHS provided to the accident and emergency department, which sometimes leads to inappropriate admissions. Schools are supported well by a number of agencies including the voluntary sector, and evaluation of the impact of these services, has demonstrated a reduction in bullying and an increase in self-esteem. Training and information materials are widely available to help and support parents, carers, children and young people, and professionals to maintain positive mental health. The employment of a psychologist by the YOS highlights the importance placed in meeting the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people who have offended.

38. The healthcare of children who are looked after by the council is good. A lead nurse and community paediatrician provide an initial assessment and healthcare plan, which is implemented and monitored by health visitors and school nurses. Although children who are looked after by the council get the CAMHS they need, the council is aware that referral processes are too complicated.

39. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive a wide range of specialist services from early years to adulthood. The identification and assessment of health needs at an early stage is improving, and the service reconfiguration at the Children's Development Centre has resulted in better access. However, waiting times for the various therapy services vary, and for non-urgent occupational therapy cases this can be up to two years. There are appropriate specialist services such as psychology and psychiatry for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who also have mental health problems. A Young Adults Transition Team provides a good service for young people from 16–25 to ease the transition from paediatric to adult health services.

Staying safe

40. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** The majority of children and young people who responded to the survey undertaken for the review and who were interviewed during the inspection said that they feel safe in school and in the local area. The majority of children and young people are provided with safe settings and are supervised by appropriately trained staff. Parents, carers and children have good access to information, training, advice and equipment to keep children safe. Although the numbers of children seriously injured or killed on roads has reduced by 38% since 1998 and numbers remain small, there has been an increase over the last two years. The council has strengthened its strategies to reverse this trend.

41. Effective systems are in place to ensure that children can report racist incidents. Regular monitoring and analysis of incidents and action plans are used to inform staff training and development, and provide specific support to schools. The numbers of reported incidents have risen over recent years as a result of this rigour. Good strategies are in place to tackle bullying. A number of initiatives have been effective in raising awareness, encouraging children to report incidents and improve the response of school staff. Children and young people also have good access to counselling and support in schools, such as that provided through the drop-in services offered by MIND. Despite many initiatives and positive comments that most children feel that bullying is dealt with well, some young people remain concerned. The youth cabinet raised these concerns and, as a result, the council is reviewing its anti-bullying strategy.

42. Agencies respond well to families and children who are subject to domestic violence. The housing department gives priority to women and children fleeing violence, and Asian women have access to a service developed to meet their specific cultural needs. Good support is provided to children at risk of sexual exploitation, or who have been sexually exploited, through the Risky Business project. Young people have been successfully diverted away from prostitution and those interviewed reported specific improvements in their lives in terms of reduced vulnerability, more stability and hope for the future.

43. Families and children in need of support and children and young people at risk of harm are supported well. Effective use is made of the good range of preventive and family support services provided by Sure Start, children's centres and family support workers. Multi-agency work is at an advanced stage with the piloting of a co-located team in Clifton, trailing the Common Assessment Framework and the integrated children's system in Maltby.

44. Arrangements for the management of referrals and assessments in social care have improved significantly since the last inspection of children's services in 2003 and are now good. The Front Desk service provides an effective screening service. Referrals are managed well and section 47 enquiries are dealt with promptly and progressed to initial conference in good time. Children in need referrals are given due attention. Assessments are mainly of a good quality and indicate a high level of input from agencies and from parents and children. The work of the family assessment team is of a very good quality and is highly commendable. Most agencies have a sound understanding of the thresholds being applied in social care. The quality of initial assessments has improved, with effective contributions from agencies. Performance is good and is now better than the national average and that found in similar areas. The time taken to complete core assessments has improved and the council is now close to its planned level of improvement.

45. Interagency collaboration and communication in relation to child protection is effective. Conferences and core group meetings are well attended and reviews are held on time. Parents are supported well to attend meetings and contribute to discussions. There is growing confidence and willingness on the part of different agencies to discuss concerns at an early stage and to support children through comprehensive children in need plans. This has led in part to the significant reductions in child protection registrations and low levels of re-registrations and re-referrals to social care. Deregistrations are high and few children remain on the register for more than two years, which is good.

46. Social worker vacancies have reduced significantly over recent months and effective strategies are in place to ensure sustainability. All children on the child protection register have an allocated qualified social worker. Child protection referrals for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are undertaken by a specialist social work team, which is good. All children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have effective transition plans and they and their families have access to a range of specialist services including respite care in residential or family settings. Practitioners work well to coordinate their care and support, and a keyworker scheme is under development.

47. The numbers of children who are looked after by the council have reduced significantly over the last year and the rate is below national levels. The majority have good-quality care plans that are regularly reviewed. They are mainly placed in foster care and few are placed out of the area. The percentage of children with three or more placements is comparatively low and compares well with the national average. However, long-term stability for children who

are looked after by the council is generally only adequate. The number of foster carers is insufficient to meet the variety of children's and young people's needs. Children's homes are in need of refurbishment to bring them up all up to national standards.

48. Most young people who are looked after by the council have a qualified worker allocated to their case. However, a small number, whose cases are actively worked with by trainee social workers, have experienced changes of staff when trainees go on placement. All reviews are held on time. Independent reviewing officers effectively ensure that plans progress well. However, the independent reviewing officer service is at an early stage of development and protocols have yet to be developed. Children who are looked after by the council have access to a good rights and advocacy service which is child-centred and accessible, particularly for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children who are looked after by the council have good access to a children's complaints officer, which is valued by them.

49. The number of children adopted from care is good and most children are placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision. Young people leaving care are well supported and have access to safe accommodation. The leaving care service makes every effort to ensure regular contact with young people and ensure that they keep themselves safe. There are satisfactory procedures and monitoring systems to establish the whereabouts of children who move between settings or who go missing. The multi-agency plan to integrate services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is progressing well and has strong commitment from all agencies.

50. Joint agency arrangements for the management of sex offenders in the community are well established. Multi-agency protection meetings are attended by key agencies in the localities concerned. Staff recruitment policies and practices are comprehensive and include appropriate statutory checks for those working with children. The LSCB, chaired by the chief executive of the council, has been in place for over a year and there is a high level of support from key agencies. The Board provides a good range and level of child protection courses that supplement single agency training which are highly regarded and very well attended by practitioners from all agencies. There is access to up-to-date policy, procedures and protocols that have been reviewed in light of new guidance. The Board is ensuring that recommendations from the Bichard enquiry are being implemented.

Enjoying and achieving

51. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Parents and carers have access to a good range of information provided, for example, by the children's information service, the voluntary sector directory of support and the Welcome Centre for asylum seekers and refugees. Information leaflets are provided in community languages and the council employs a part-time bilingual outreach officer and uses a telephone translation

service to facilitate communication and support for families for whom English is an additional language. However, small numbers of parents of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities feel there is a lack of information available to them.

52. Effective partnership work ensures that the majority of children and young people and their families are supported well. Areas with the highest levels of deprivation are prioritised for the development of children's centres and extended schools. There is a good range of initiatives and strong integrated provision within local communities, such as Rawmarsh, through the full-service school that ensures families and young people can access education, training, health services and leisure activities in one place.

53. Rotherham provides good support for early years education and childcare. Provision is of good quality and is accessible and well planned. There are sufficient, suitable places to meet the needs of all 3 and 4-year olds and there has been an increase in the number of childcare providers and places to meet demand. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of provision in all settings are effective. Good training and support activities are accessed by early years providers, with good take-up rates. The portage service is good and provides effective support to young children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The service is highly regarded by parents who particularly value the integrated approach taken by services to meet their young children's needs. Early intervention for this group of children, once identified, is good. However, a small number of parents report that more enhanced nursery provision is needed. Advice and support from the parent partnership service is satisfactory, although a small number of parents say that they are unclear about how to access information and guidance to help them identify their child's learning needs.

54. The school improvement service provides effective and appropriate challenge, and timely intervention and support to schools causing concern and for national strategies. Service strengths include challenge and support to schools on the use of data, leadership and management, teaching and learning, and school self-evaluation. Data are used rigorously to target improvement at school, group and individual pupil level. The service has developed good partnership working with schools and this is valued. Together they have had a significant effect on the quality of education provided and pupil achievement in schools in recent years. The number of schools categorised by Ofsted as requiring special measures or as a cause for concern has reduced by 50% in 2004/05. No schools have required special measures since the new section 5 school inspections began in September 2005, and only one has been given a notice to improve.

55. Children's and young people's educational progress is generally improving, often at a faster rate than that found nationally, which is good. Standards are satisfactory overall. The council and schools are aware of the need to raise the achievement and progress of some groups such as boys, some children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds and some young people aged 11 to 14.

56. Planning of school places is effective; as a result the number of surplus places in schools is low. Admissions procedures are good and are administered efficiently and effectively. Monitoring, review and evaluation procedures are robust, and almost all parents access their first choice of school place.

57. The education welfare and inclusion services are highly regarded by schools. Their challenge and support to schools to improve attendance and behaviour, address bullying and reduce anti-social behaviour is good. Pupil attendance in primary and secondary schools is similar to that found nationally and is improving at a faster rate. Effective strategies are in place to reduce exclusions and, as a result, the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions is low. Provision for young people who are excluded is good and the majority are returned to mainstream schools quickly. The hospital tuition service is good and provision for children educated at home is satisfactory. Records for children and young people missing from education are satisfactory and recent actions to improve processes are appropriate.

58. Children have access to a good range of enrichment and voluntary learning opportunities, particularly through extended services in schools and youth service activities. Good provision is made for specific groups for example, young Asian women and young Christian men, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A Rothercard enables young people to access leisure facilities at reduced prices and there is subsidised transport for them. The Mega-active Summer project provides a wide range of accessible recreational and voluntary learning activities for children and young people aged from five to 19 throughout the summer holidays. It also offers some provision for families and gives clear guidance to them about travel and holiday arrangements and safety in the sun.

59. Good support is provided to children who are looked after by the council. All schools have a designated teacher for looked after children, and almost all have a designated governor to ensure their needs are met. Each child or young person who is looked after by the council is assigned an education welfare officer. Effective coordinated action across a range of services is beginning to affect the attendance and achievement of children who are looked after by the council. For example, good partnership working has ensured there have been no exclusions of children looked after by the council since 2004. Their attendance and achievement at school, although low, is improving well. The Get Real team and the Rotherham Community Resource Project, in conjunction with Connexions advisors, undertake very good project work with this vulnerable group of young people.

60. Statutory assessment processes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effective, appropriate and timely. Good progress has been made towards implementation of the council's inclusion strategy. This includes the aim of meeting children's and young people's special educational needs without the need for a statement and within mainstream settings where possible, or in local special schools. As a result, the number of children and young people with statements has significantly reduced and the numbers educated out of the borough, or in non-maintained or independent special schools, is low.

Making a positive contribution

61. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good, with some very good features.

Children, young people and their families are provided with a good range of opportunities to help them develop socially and emotionally. Parenting classes and family learning programmes are promoted well, including targeted projects to help fathers to maintain positive relationships with their children. Partnership work with the voluntary and private sectors is good, and provides an extensive range of services to support families in need. In 2005, the voluntary sector supported over 13,500 children and young people across Rotherham. The youth service has made very good efforts to ensure that vulnerable young people, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are involved in citizenship programmes through the Millennium Volunteering scheme. As a result of their increased confidence and self-esteem, some volunteers have gone on to provide mentoring support to others.

62. Good support is provided to help children and young people manage changes and challenges in their lives. For example, the DAWN project provides good support to families dealing with divorce, where children and young people can benefit from individual counselling. Young carers are provided with good opportunities to meet regularly through the YMCA, a voluntary organisation commissioned to provide a service for up to 50 young carers. This service is underused as only 13 young people currently attend and it is not well known by all agencies. As a result, not all young carers who would benefit access the service. The council's young carers policy is out of date and some young carers report that schools are not always aware of their needs.

63. Children and young people are strongly encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them, and their views and opinions are increasingly informing strategic plans and some service planning of the council and partners. A very good example is the 'visioning' exercise that took place in the summer of 2005 involving over 5,500 children and young people to support the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. Consultation resulted in a representative group of 35 young people attending a residential course, where they were able to contribute to the council's audit of need and inform the priorities and production of the plan.

64. The very active youth cabinet has produced a good, clear and coherent manifesto for change. Youth cabinet members are involved in many projects from raising awareness of racism and fascism to promoting fair trade and raising money for other countries experiencing poverty. They have been instrumental in encouraging the council to review its anti-bullying strategy, following young people's concerns.

65. Looked after children are a key priority for the council, which is excellent at carrying out its corporate parenting role. There is a looked after children's scrutiny panel which involves young people, and regular face-to-face contact takes place between members and this group of young people. Many very good opportunities are provided to help them participate imaginatively in reviews and other meetings about their care. Their views are taken into account and acted upon and extensive efforts are made to consult them about service design and planning. Advocacy is provided through the Rights2Rights service and children who are looked after by the council are empowered to make complaints if they wish to and are provided with feedback. Transition planning for them is managed well.

66. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also encouraged to attend and contribute fully to their reviews and almost all do. Transition planning for them is improving and now good, with the appointment of a disability planning coordinator. Young people spoken to during the review had a good understanding of their individual education plans, and were fully aware of the targets they needed to achieve. Good efforts are made to consult with this group of young people. As a result, some of them, with the help of the advocacy service, have set up their own consultation group called the Orchard Flyers to discuss issues related to short breaks and respite. Some young people in the group have developed their communication skills and confidence so well that they have undertaken accredited training to become children's rights representatives for their peers.

67. The council and its partners work effectively to support young people who are at risk of anti-social behaviour. The Positive Activities for Young People Programme offered by the youth service is a good example of how young people are identified and targeted to engage in a range of diversionary activities. During 2004/05, the programme provided activities for over 1,364 young people at risk. Interagency work, through the development of the multi-agency safer neighbourhood teams, is beginning to inform the identification of area hotspots and has enabled high-visibility patrolling of officers, including support from wardens and the youth liaison officer, to ensure timely action is taken to prevent and reduce anti-social behaviour.

68. The YOS is embedded well at strategic and operational levels through effective partnership working across the borough's criminal justice system and children and young people's service. The service provides a range of good-quality and creative activities to prevent offending and re-offending. Particularly good work takes place to meet the diverse needs of children and young people who offend. Although the quality of prevention work is good, it is not always

sufficiently well targeted. Good and timely arrangements are in place to address the mental health needs of young people who offend who also have mental health problems, although 17 and 18 year olds find it difficult to access these services, due to the complexity of the system at this level. The system is to be simplified to ensure improved access. Support to young people after they have served their sentences is good. However, there is a lack of suitable accommodation for young people who offend despite work being undertaken to address this, which can have a significant impact on preventing re-offending.

Achieving economic well-being

69. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. The council and its partners place a strong emphasis on parental involvement in education and learning as a means of promoting economic benefits for families and young people. Good evaluation procedures monitor and assess the benefits of family learning programmes in terms of improved basic skills, training and work opportunities for parents and young children's achievement at school. A good range of childcare facilities is provided to young parents and carers. Evaluations from programmes indicate they are well informed about the range of facilities available. Good coordination and joint working exists between Sure Start, Connexions, health services and early year's providers, who work with and support lone parents and their young children. There are good links between the children's information service and Jobcentre Plus to offer assistance in claiming childcare tax credits and benefits to help young parents into learning or the workplace. In conjunction with Sheffield, there is an effective project to promote good work-life balance and family-friendly employment policies with local businesses.

70. A 14-19 strategy is in place in Rotherham with effective collaborative working between schools, colleges and providers. Young people aged 14 to 16 are well prepared for their working lives and access a good range of work experience opportunities in their secondary schools. There are some innovative and highly effective vocational education programmes that provide an alternative to a fully school-based curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds. These cater for differing ability levels. For example, in partnership with the Construction Academy in Hellaby, nine schools provide a good vocational training route for approximately 70 young people at risk of disaffection with school, who spend two days each week in a positive work-like adult environment learning appropriate trade skills. Similarly, four schools work well in partnership with two local colleges to provide Young Apprenticeship programmes for more able pupils who wish to specialise in the arts, engineering or business studies.

71. Enterprise and business is promoted well across the 14-16 curriculum. The Chamber of Commerce, Connexions service and schools cooperate effectively to provide young people with a good range of employment-related projects. A highly effective E2E programme is provided for young people aged over 16 who require additional support before starting work or participating in mainstream education or training. This is particularly well designed to prepare

these young people to move into local training or employment opportunities. All young people have access to satisfactory careers information, advice and guidance while at school.

72. Effective coordination between different educational institutions has ensured the provision of a complementary range of educational opportunities and learning pathways for young people that are soundly based on the strengths of each institution. The local Learning Partnership ensures that there is good cooperation between all sectors to avoid duplication of provision. All providers have at least satisfactory approaches to equality of opportunity, and the equality of opportunity arrangements for the E2E programme is outstanding.

73. Good partnership working to meet individual young people's needs has meant that the proportion of young people aged 16–19 who enter employment, education or training has increased significantly since 2003, although the proportion remains below national averages. The average point score for GCE/VCEA/AS qualifications of young people aged 16–18 has also improved significantly, at a faster rate than the national average and that found in similar areas. Performance is now well above that in similar areas and just below the national average.

74. The Connexions service has been particularly successful at improving information sharing between agencies to better target support to young people and to ensure that joint services are planned more effectively.

75. There are strong links between individual institutions, organisations and employers, but there has sometimes been insufficient strategic action to coordinate a full response to the needs of all young people aged 16–19. For example, little progress has been made recently towards identified need to increase training opportunities for young people completing E2E programmes. Completion rates for modern apprenticeships remain low and too few young people aged 16–19 in employment participate in accredited training at work.

76. Rotherham's renewal and regeneration strategy is good and is beginning to make a difference to employment opportunities for the young people of Rotherham. Inward investment has led to general economic growth and increased employment opportunities for many families. There has been significant investment in new housing. As a result there is little reliance on bed-and-breakfast accommodation for families. Where such accommodation has been needed, lengths of stay have been shorter than those found nationally.

77. Care leavers receive good support to prepare them for independent adult life. Since 2002, the proportion of care leavers who enter education, employment or training has improved significantly, and is greater than that found nationally. All care leavers have pathway plans to which they contribute and they are provided with good support to find suitable accommodation through the housing advice unit at the Bridges centre. They also receive useful advice about financial matters, welfare support and health. The Connexions

service provides helpful advice about learning and work and promotes opportunities for enrichment activities, such as work experience abroad.

78. Services and schools work well together to provide effective transitions for the majority of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities moving into post-16 education, although the proportion of this group of young people who leave post-16 education early is high. Work has begun to address this through the development of a new federation. Good progress has been made to improve the take-up of direct payments to families of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Service management

79. **The management of services for children and young people is good and the capacity to improve further is good.** The council and its partners are ambitious, work well together and share a common vision for improving the achievement and well-being of their children and young people. A powerful driver for change is the tangible enthusiasm of all stakeholders to make things better. Councillors have shown their commitment by taking politically difficult decisions such as the major schools Private Finance Initiative.

80. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in Rotherham is well established and devotes one of its five key themes to learning, as set out in the community plan. The CYPP and well-being strategy, are brought together in a well-written single plan, whose objectives and targets are linked to the community plan. There are good links between the single plan and the council's corporate plan, thereby ensuring that efforts are consistently focused on what matters.

81. The single plan sets out a very clear vision for the future, initially for three years, but with signposts beyond that. It has been based on a thorough audit of need and is underpinned by sound service and business plans which are focused on delivery. This extends to partners, where, for example, health priorities and service delivery plans have been effectively reconfigured to meet needs. Targets, timescales and accountabilities are well set out so that success can be measured and resource requirements provide sufficient detail so that councillors can judge the affordability of the plan. The level of commitment from partners and the strong links to both social and economic regeneration strategies help make ambitions sustainable.

82. Prioritisation is good. The council has consistently prioritised children and young people, with significant financial investment above government guidelines. More recently, councillors have increased the base budget for children's social care, based on a thorough benchmarked review. The council has also provided in excess of £1 million over three years to ease the transition into children's and young people's services and trust arrangements. Significant areas of new investment have been undertaken to tackle the priorities set out in the single plan. For example, an extra £200,000 has been targeted to give disabled children more choice over service providers through direct payments. Savings and disinvestment in lower-priority areas, such as the music service

and governor support, have released funding for higher-priority tasks. Such financial aspects can be tracked through the council's robust medium-term financial strategy. Investments from partners are less easily tracked.

83. A children and young people's service is established and increasingly strong partnerships are extending capacity. Trust arrangements are well advanced and a children's board is in place with membership now drawn from the relevant strategic level of the partners, including senior representation from the voluntary sector. Terms of reference are agreed and the board is well on track to being fully operational by the target date of 2008. Links with the LSP and the LSCB are strong, and there are effective protocols leading to good communication between agencies, particularly in child protection. The highly regarded director for children and young people's services and lead member for children and young people provide powerful and trusted leadership, ensuring the continued drive for improvement across the service. A joint leadership team, comprising senior managers from all key partners, provides an effective mechanism for ensuring action plans stay on track.

84. Co-location of interagency staff is in place and working well in two key wards, with further roll-out well planned. The focus of most interagency collaboration is clearly on vulnerable groups, with many examples of how services are being made more accessible. The continuous progress in service improvement and many outcomes demonstrates a determination by partners not to be distracted by minor issues.

85. Current capacity is good, as is the capacity to continue to improve. Relevant council services are in a sound financial position, which in itself constitutes a major improvement since the 2001 inspection of the local education authority. Good budget monitoring, control and planning processes provide a solid basis for realising ambitions. Value for money is good, as are procedures for consistently assuring this, confirming the external auditor's position. The process of base budget reviews not only explores this aspect, but also ensures that planning, investment and delivery are on track. Service and senior managers are held to account through this process, and they are able to make development bids – all within the framework of a secure medium-term financial strategy. Some budgets are pooled and others are aligned. However, the commissioning strategy is underdeveloped, particularly in terms of services provided by the voluntary sector. This position is recognised by the children's board.

86. Children's services have benefited from good access to external grants; innovatively, this also extends to access to regeneration sources. Exit and mainstreaming strategies are in various stages of development. There continues to be significant investment in recruiting, retaining and training staff. A recent example is where innovative action and modest financial investment has reduced the vacancy rates for social workers from around 40% to 14%. However, a workforce strategy matched to the single plan is still in development. Children's services sickness absence rates are lower than that

found in the council generally, although sickness rates across the council remain too high.

87. The good corporate asset management plan is an example of how the council assesses its capacity and matches it to the needs of the community through the key LSP themes. Nine new schools have already been opened using PFI credits, with six more on stream.

88. There are sound plans in place to address any lack of capacity. For example, the number of foster carers is too small, especially from minority ethnic communities, and there are insufficient vocational placements for young people post-16.

89. There is a well-established and effective performance management framework in place across children's services. Very good use is made of data analysis by the leadership team to evaluate performance and to develop strategies for improvement. There is good support from the finance team for managing budgets. The leadership team is rigorously held to account for its actions through the planning and review processes. The leadership team has developed excellent practice to support performance improvement by training 50 young people as peer evaluators who consider key issues for the authority and help them to improve practice and solve problems. Links between performance and costs are reasonably well developed. Evaluation of progress towards the achievement of priorities is considered in terms of value for money alongside outcomes. Scrutiny is effective, especially in policy and overview, with performance mainly being challenged through the overarching performance, scrutiny and overview committee.

90. The self-assessment produced by partners provided a good evaluation of the current position in Rotherham. The council and its partners have made significant efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people. The continued focus on performance is having a real impact. However, there is still much to do, especially in narrowing the gaps between Rotherham and national performance, between areas within Rotherham and for specific groups, for example boys and the achievement of some children and young people from minority ethnic communities, or where improvements have been marginal, such as attainment of vocational level 2 by age 19. However, these are systematically being challenged.

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

1. Council services for children and young people in Rotherham are good and outcomes for them are generally improving. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well for children and young people. The majority of children and young people appear safe. Those most at risk are well protected. Young people who are looked after by the council, with learning difficulties or in greatest need receive good care and support, including education. There has been significant improvement in the quality, provision and impact of social care and school improvement services in recent years. The majority of young people enjoy and attend school and are making progress. A range of opportunities is provided to help many young people make a positive contribution and prepare them well for their future lives. The council's youth service is good and supports the council's priority to involve, listen and respond to young people's views well.

2. Children and young people have been a long-term priority of the council, and it has historically invested above government guidelines. This is continuing as the council moves towards Children's Trust arrangements by 2008. The council's use of additional external funding such as regeneration monies to support priorities for children and young people is notable practice.

3. The council, with its partners, has set out an ambitious vision and strategy for improving outcomes for children and young people in a single plan. It is based on a thorough audit of need and links to higher-level council plans. The plan is underpinned by robust service and business plans which are focused on delivery, and effective, thorough and accountable performance management procedures. Good budget monitoring, control and planning processes provide a solid basis for realising ambitions. Value for money is good, as are procedures for consistently assuring this. Some budgets are pooled and more are aligned. However, the need to develop the commissioning strategy further is recognised by the children's board, particularly in terms of the voluntary sector's contribution.

4. Management of the council's services for children is good and the capacity to improve is good. Services for children and young people were brought together in October 2005 and are the direct responsibility of the executive director of the children's and young people's service. They are overseen at the highest level by a children's board. The highly regarded director for children and young people's services and lead member for children and young people provide powerful and trusted leadership, ensuring the continued drive for improvement across the service. They are well supported by a joint leadership team. The council's workforce strategies have led to significant improvement in the recruitment and retention of staff, although a workforce strategy matched to the single plan is still in development.

5. The council works effectively with its partners to promote and improve children's and young people's physical and mental health, including those who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A significant success is the National Healthy Schools Programme. Good mental health is positively promoted and access to a wide range of CAMHS is available within acceptable timescales. Healthcare for children who are looked after by the council is good. Some health outcomes require improvement and these are linked to the historically high levels of deprivation in some areas. However, the council and partners have plans and initiatives in place to address such health inequalities, including the promotion of breastfeeding and tackling the high number of teenage pregnancies. These initiatives are having a positive effect.

6. From the evidence gathered during the joint area review, children and young people in Rotherham appear safe. The council and its partners provide a good range of family advice, support and early prevention services. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children on the child protection register and in those entering the looked after system. Once in care support is good. The majority of these children are placed in foster care but the number of available carers is low. Bullying is addressed well, but some concerns remain. In response to the concerns of the youth cabinet, the council has prioritised this as an area for improvement this year. A Local Safeguarding Children Board is in place and working effectively. Safe recruitment practices are in place with good coordinated arrangements for the management of serious offenders in the community.

7. The council places a high priority on the achievement and enjoyment of children and young people in school and in their communities. Early years education is of good quality, with enough early years and childcare places to meet the needs of parents. Children are well prepared for school and they make satisfactory progress by the age of seven. Standards of attainment for children and young people aged 11 and 14 are generally in line with those in similar areas and national averages. At 16 standards are in line with similar areas but remain below national averages. However, the rate of improvement in recent years has often been faster than national averages and that found in similar areas. The council and schools are aware of the need to improve the achievement of some groups of young people, including some from minority ethnic communities and boys. The council is working with schools to raise standards for these groups. Attendance is similar to that found nationally, behaviour is good and exclusions are low.

8. The council works with its partners to provide a good range of activities to help children and young people, including vulnerable groups, develop socially and emotionally, build their self-esteem and manage challenges in their lives. The majority are strongly encouraged to participate in decision-making and contribute to the development of plans for them. Effective multi-agency work ensures that young people are targeted and engaged in activities to deter them from anti-social behaviour and prevent offending and re-offending. Most young

people who offend, who also experience mental health problems, have good access to mental health services, although 17 and 18 year olds have more difficulty due to the complexity of the system at this level.

9. The council has invested in regeneration and renewal activities that have provided benefits to children and young people and families and provides, with partners, good support to prepare young people for working life. Good family learning programmes have a positive effect on better outcomes for parents such as improved basic skills and on literacy and numeracy skills for young people. The educational achievement of 16–18 year olds in school is improving and the proportion of young people aged 16–19 entering employment, education or training has improved significantly in the past two years, although it is still below national averages. However, the success rates of young people achieving a level 2 qualification at the age of 19 has not improved over the past two years and remains below the national average. Housing for young people is generally good and care leavers receive good advice and support as they prepare for independent living.