

Narrowing the Gap in Children's Services cont.

high, and there is a lack of appropriate placements for looked after children. Too frequently these act as barriers to children's safety and well-being.

Good practice example...

Rotherham: Involving children and young people in performance management

Rotherham young people's (youth) services have developed a peer evaluation process that provides opportunities for young people and staff to get involved in quality-assurance processes.

Each peer evaluation has a focus on either an Every Child Matters/community strategy theme, or on a geographical area. The process is intended to complement more traditional 'top down' quality-assurance procedures by developing a real sense of ownership and understanding of quality issues throughout the service. www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503999.

Enjoying and achieving

High performing partnerships have a clear focus on raising educational standards, provide strong

intervention and support for schools causing concern and demonstrate effective strategies to narrow gaps in attainment and achievement for particular groups. Nevertheless, in some areas there is ineffective local authority support for poor performing schools. For some children and young people, poor levels of attendance, unmet behavioural needs and high levels of exclusion are barriers to enjoying and achieving.

Making a positive contribution High-performing areas are effective in tackling issues raised by young people, such as bullying, and ensure that vulnerable groups have opportunities to influence local policy and service improvements. In weaker performing areas, services for vulnerable groups are frequently poorly coordinated and young people report that they do not have a voice in the key decisions that affect them.

Achieving economic well-being In good partnerships, strategies regarding 14–19 provision are based on an accurate analysis of need and what is available to meet such needs; there is also excellent communication between a wide range of partners. In these cases, all young

people, including those from vulnerable groups, benefit from flexible progression routes and good quality advice, guidance and counselling. However, there are a number of barriers to achieving economic well-being, including insufficient support for young people who are not in education, employment or training, variable quality and range of post-16 provision across the locality and insufficient suitable housing for those requiring it.

Capacity to improve, including service management In higher-performing areas partnership working is strongly embedded, with sound financial management, good use of resources and data, and a commitment to securing value for money. Areas for improvement include undertaking a more thorough analysis of need that includes the specific requirements of vulnerable groups, and ensuring that there are effective performance management arrangements across partnerships.

Recommendations

These are intended to support councils and their partners in pursuing further service improvements in order to narrow the gaps in