



The Annual Report of
Her Majesty's Chief
Inspector of Education,
Children's Services and
Skills 2007/08

Summary



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Preface

Christine Gilbert

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector



This summary of the 2007/08 Annual Report presents evidence from the first full year of inspection and regulation undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, which came into being in April 2007. The report covers the period from July 2007 to August 2008 and sets out findings from childcare, children's social care, and education and skills provision for learners of all ages.

I hope that this short document provides a readable and useful summary of the key issues and main findings from the full report, which is available from the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. It begins with my commentary, in which I offer a personal overview of some important issues emerging from the inspection of the childcare, children's social care, and education and skills sectors. This is followed by the key findings and the principal sector-by-sector overview charts based on inspection data.

The full report contains three substantial thematic sections. The first, 'Improving life chances: outstanding education and social care', examines the means by which providers achieve excellence and, in so doing, make significant improvements in the life chances of the most disadvantaged children, young people and adults. The second thematic

section is entitled 'Safeguarding children', and in it we report on the progress that has been made in ensuring children grow up safe from harm and neglect, and with the personal skills needed to enter adult life successfully. This section draws on the third joint chief inspectors' report on arrangements to safeguard children.¹ The final thematic section reports on the quality of the provision that seeks to enable learners to acquire the skills needed for successful working lives.

As in previous years, we shall be recognising and celebrating those providers of education, care and skills whose work is of the highest quality. The annual list of outstanding providers is published simultaneously with this report. I hope the report and summary will be widely read and discussed, and that its wide-ranging approach to the evaluation of learning and care will contribute to the continuing work of raising standards and aspirations and improving lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Gilbert". Below the signature is a horizontal line.

¹ *Safeguarding children: the third joint chief inspectors' report on arrangements to safeguard children* (080062), Ofsted, 2008.

Commentary



As Chief Inspector, the production of the Annual Report offers me a unique opportunity to reflect on what is working well for children and learners and to shine a light on what needs to be improved. That means presenting an overview of quality: strengths, weaknesses, success stories, concerns. I hope this report does just that. It does not pull punches where there are concerns; but, equally, it shows where things are improving and going well for children, young people and adult learners. Ofsted is much more than a schools inspectorate these days, and this report reflects outstanding quality and strong improvement across all the sectors we regulate and inspect.

Changes in a single year are rarely dramatic; nor would we expect them to be, despite our understandable impatience with the pace of change. This is why what matters most is sustained improvement in both outcomes and capacity. As I look back over the annual reports of my predecessors, one thing is clear: for most children and learners, things are getting better, and this Annual Report illustrates the point.

- ✦ There is a higher proportion of good or outstanding childcare and early education than ever before.
- ✦ Of the maintained schools inspected this year, almost two thirds are good or outstanding. The proportion of good or outstanding schools has risen by five percentage points since 2005/06. The quality of nursery education is particularly high.
- ✦ In the children's social care sector, of the services inspected this year, two thirds are good or outstanding.
- ✦ Improvement continues in secure accommodation for children and young people; behaviour is better and there is now a proper focus on basic skills.
- ✦ The trend of improvement in colleges of further education continues, with an increased proportion good or outstanding.
- ✦ Many providers in the adult learning sector are successfully meeting the needs of learners who have found it difficult to engage in learning at or beyond school, or to move into sustained employment.
- ✦ Initial teacher education programmes are designed well and trainees are highly motivated and enthusiastic.

Eradicating failure

But such undoubted improvements do not mean that all is well; if education in England is going to compare favourably with the best in the world, standards need to improve further. There has been a considerable reduction in the proportion of 11-year-olds who transfer from primary to secondary education without reaching the expected level in English and mathematics; even so, the proportion today is still one in five. A decade ago, two thirds of secondary age pupils left compulsory education without grades A* to C in five subjects at GCSE including English and mathematics. Today the figure is still more than half.

There are, then, still major challenges ahead and worrying pockets of poor performance. This is particularly true of services for disadvantaged children. Across England, the opportunities available to these children fall well short of those available to others. As I said last year, the relationship between poverty and outcomes for young people is stark. The poor outcomes for young people living in the most disadvantaged areas are seen at every stage of the education and care sectors. To give just one example, Ofsted's recent report on childcare, *Leading to excellence*, highlights not only the variation in the quality of provision across the country but that children living in deprived areas have access to fewer good childcare settings.

What matters most is sustained improvement in both outcomes and capacity... For most children and learners, things are getting better.

A number of measures have had some impact on these young people and it has been encouraging to see the success of initiatives such as the London Challenge and Teach First. It is also encouraging to see that of the 10 academies inspected this year three were outstanding, five good and two satisfactory. We are also beginning to see the positive impact of a growing number of children's centres and extended schools. There are signs too that more young people are staying on in education and training. Yet the rate of improvement in the performance of disadvantaged groups of learners remains too slow and the quality of the support for them is still not good enough. So while the attainment of disadvantaged children and young people has risen, so have standards nationally, and consequently the gap between those best placed to take advantage of the services provided for them and those missing out – typically, and put simply, children from poor families – remains wide. Despite effort and investment, the educational attainment of looked after children and their levels of participation in post-16 education, training and employment remain unacceptably poor.

Poverty is not the only indicator of lives at risk. The progress of many learners for whom English is an additional language is uneven, and there is too much variation in the support provided to this group of learners from one local area to another. In prisons, too little attention is given to adults for whom English is an additional language, and often little distinction is made between those who may be illiterate in their own language and those who are literate but have poor English language skills. And, as has been stressed in annual reports over the years, the gap remains between the performance of male and female learners.

We have seen some narrowing of the gap in GCSE achievement between black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and white pupils, but for some groups the combination of gender, ethnic group and socio-economic background is associated with the very lowest levels of economic achievement. For example, national data suggest that the impact of poverty is greater on secondary pupils of

White British and Black Caribbean background than on other groups. The attainment of White British boys from poor homes remains particularly low, blighting their opportunities to participate in higher education, seen by many as the key to social mobility. Ofsted's evidence also shows that programmes designed to help adults in deprived areas move into work have too low a success rate. In short, if you are poor, you are more likely to receive poor services: disadvantage compounds disadvantage.

For the youngest children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, early and effective intervention can greatly improve their subsequent achievement and life chances. In the overwhelming majority of schools, these pupils make satisfactory or better progress, and in most local areas support agencies are working together more effectively across health, education and social care. But there are unacceptable delays in access to some key specialist services, and there is too much variation in the training of teachers to teach pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the further education and adult skills sectors there is too much inconsistency in the degree to which individual learning needs are met. Provision for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is among the least effective aspects of adult and community learning. And in custodial settings, the welfare of young people and adults in this group gives cause for concern.

Hence the importance of the quality of the services provided for those in disadvantaged circumstances. With the right educational provision and social support around them, children and young people from poor families can reach high standards, overcoming initial disadvantage to achieve personal success. Ofsted will shortly be publishing a review of outstanding secondary schools in challenging areas – schools which have demonstrated that they can deliver high quality education, year in year out, against the odds. Effective programmes for adults in challenging circumstances enable them to find permanent jobs and to exert a positive influence on their families and communities. Indeed,

inspectors consistently report that good provision can make a profound difference to adult learners' life chances.

Typically, the provision that really makes a difference is ambitious. It does not believe that anyone's past or present circumstances should define their future. Children and learners are put first and treated as individuals; they are supported and expected to make progress and achieve well. Aspirations are high. They are engaged in their own development and learning. Where children and young people are involved, parents and carers are actively included in their development and progress, so helping them to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Success across all the areas we regulate and inspect does not happen by chance. It is the result of careful planning, monitoring and review. It involves a relentless search for ways to generate further improvement. And, crucially, it rests on the outstanding commitment, skills and dogged perseverance of the staff involved. The importance of learners experiencing consistently high quality teaching cannot be overemphasised; by way of example, Ofsted's recent report on the teaching of mathematics highlights vividly the difference that can be made when a subject is taught well. As has been said before, satisfactory provision will not be good enough for these children and learners.

If education in England is going to compare favourably with the best in the world, standards need to improve further.

There are still major challenges ahead and worrying pockets of poor performance. This is particularly true of services for disadvantaged children.

Safeguarding children and young people

We have a particular responsibility as a society to ensure that services for children, young people and their families whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable – particularly children in care or custody – are as good as possible. This is why I am so determined to highlight where such provision falls below that standard. As part of this commitment, in 2008 Ofsted, with partner inspectorates, published the latest three-year review of safeguarding. In the second part of this Annual Report we highlight again its important messages. Most children are safe in their homes and communities and receive the quality of care and support they need, but there are still weaknesses and there remains much to do, and to do with a sense of urgency. The challenge to those responsible for improving inadequate services is identified unequivocally by Ofsted's inspection of children's services. Those services that are judged to be outstanding in supporting the looked after children in their care share an important characteristic: they perform well across the entire spectrum of services that have an impact on the lives of these children and young people, thereby ensuring a level of consistency and stability previously lacking.

But there are particularly worrying concerns about weaknesses in children's homes and the volatility of the quality of them. For example, around 7% of children's homes are judged to be inadequate in keeping the children in their care safe. Given the centrality of these services to children's lives and prospects, this is a high level of inadequacy. Inspections highlight the lack of experienced and competent staff, and insufficient compliance with requirements for the supervision of staff. Moreover, the choice of placement remains limited for most children and some feel it is hard to influence decisions that involve them.

Rates of educational attainment and school attendance remain unacceptably low for looked after children compared with other children, and rates of improvement have been slower than for their peers. Children and young people in most areas continue to experience frequent changes of social worker. This lack of continuity has an adverse effect on the implementation of their care plans. Some looked after children and young people who go into custody subsequently have less contact with their allocated social worker than required or expected; this was the case in one in six youth offending team areas inspected. This is a particular problem where children are in custody a long distance from their home area. Furthermore, this Annual Report identifies shortcomings in the support for children and families who are involved in family court proceedings and where the welfare of children is, or may be, in question.

Inspection has identified many improvements to safeguarding arrangements over the past three years, noting successful practice across a range of settings. But some children and young people are still not served well enough by public services, and there is still much to do to ensure that all children are properly safeguarded, particularly looked after children and those in secure settings.

Prioritising literacy and numeracy

Much has been written in recent years about the priority afforded the teaching of English and mathematics in schools. This must continue to be a high priority. There is certainly evidence of improvement but it remains too slow, and there are schools where reading is not strong which are not yet systematically using the most effective teaching methods: in particular the use of phonics in the teaching of early reading. However, it is encouraging to report that primary trainee teachers now often have a good knowledge of how to teach early reading and writing: if we get it right for young children, we can help them avoid difficulties in later life.

Yet too many have not acquired these skills at school and it is all the more important then that they have access to high quality support for literacy and numeracy in later years. Raising the skills level of the nation is a major government priority: not only are high standards of technical and vocational skills important, but good standards of literacy and numeracy are central to securing and sustaining employment. A high priority must be the provision of well targeted support for those from disadvantaged groups, with particular attention given to identifying and addressing problems with literacy and numeracy.

The report indicates that the quality and availability of support for these basic skills are at best patchy. The poor literacy and numeracy skills of some groups of young people and adults are particularly striking. These include offenders, whose skills are below level 1 for over 60% of those assessed, while nearly all children and young people entering secure settings have skills below the national average.

It is clearly easier to assess skills than improve them, an issue emerging from Ofsted's inspection of provision offered through Train to Gain and Jobcentre Plus. Too much time is spent in accrediting existing skills rather than developing new ones. The best providers now link an individual's literacy and numeracy skills to specific employment skills

and potential work roles, but this is sensitive territory and employers are often reluctant to broach concerns about basic skills with employees. Nevertheless, a failure to address learners' needs in literacy and numeracy is a significant and long-term weakness of the adult learning and skills sector.

Improving capacity

It is encouraging to see how much is improving across the sectors we regulate and inspect. This Annual Report provides many examples of improvement, sometimes sector-wide improvement, from across the education, skills, childcare and social care sectors. For example, the quality of self-evaluation is now good or outstanding in seven in 10 maintained secondary schools; 10 years ago it was judged to be at least good in only three in 10 schools. This is a remarkable turnaround, and particularly important. Settings that can identify honestly and clearly their strengths and weaknesses are likely to be well placed to identify their most important priorities and from these to bring about improvement.



Further education colleges are continuing to improve, with over 70% now good or outstanding; and although the number of students is relatively small, it is encouraging to see that independent specialist colleges – generally catering for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – are performing better than ever before. The work-based learning sector is also improving, with the engineering, business administration and construction subject areas standing out from an increasingly successful range of programmes; completion rates are rising in apprenticeship frameworks. Employers' needs are increasingly being met, for example through programmes such as learndirect.

This report reviews how settings that were once inadequate have improved and in many instances moved to excellence. The numbers are particularly encouraging: over 1,700 childcare settings and 180 early education providers that were inadequate at their previous inspection are now satisfactory or better; almost 400 schools and six colleges that were inadequate are now satisfactory or better; and 116 children's homes that were once inadequate are now satisfactory or better. The circumstances and the routes taken are invariably unique to the individual institution or provider, but some common factors behind the improvements emerge, including:

- ✦ leadership which establishes a clear and ambitious direction for change, takes tough decisions, sets the right pace for sustained progress and secures the commitment of staff
- ✦ objective, open and reflective self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, conducted in conjunction with service users and staff, and leading to a wise analysis of the implications for individuals and the actions to take to secure improvement
- ✦ dialogue and feedback to ensure that needs are being met in a culture of excellence, both for individual service users and for the wider community from which they come.

Let me highlight two further features of outstanding settings. First, the importance of effective assessment: in schools, assessment is a key component of good teaching and learning, but also a vital management tool to highlight progress or the lack of it and to help evaluate the impact of support mechanisms. Managers of effective children's homes assess the needs of the children, evaluate the quality of care effectively and tackle weaknesses to bring about improvement. In the best childcare settings, adults regularly assess the development of the children; they also monitor the impact of their own work and, again, take action to bring about improvement.

The second feature of effective settings, across the sectors, is the way they engage and involve the children, young people and adult learners in the plans and actions that will drive improvement. Learning is personalised to meet both specific and group needs; this includes the setting of individual targets and making explicit what is needed to achieve them. In children's homes, for example, the children will be involved in making decisions about their lives; they will be clear about what is happening to them and understand the plans for their future.

These features are neither surprising nor necessarily complicated: listen to the users of a service, assess their needs collaboratively and realistically, and then take action in the light of this information. But just as these features are highlighted as strengths in the most effective settings, so they emerge, time and time again, as weaknesses when settings fail.

Supporting improvement

Many institutions need to improve, and support can come from many sources. But not all support is supportive; without careful handling, support can overwhelm or distract. A key message from this Annual Report is that good leaders know how to assess the support offered; they take what is essential, and they resist all but the right support at the right time. This point is worth emphasising: unless external support is carefully matched to individual circumstances and its impact is rigorously evaluated, it can create more problems and, at worst, slow the pace of improvement.

I have already highlighted concerns for those groups of children and learners who are missing out in the general improvement across sectors, the rising levels of attainment and the remarkable range of opportunities now available to most. Most settings improve, often strongly and rapidly, from an inspection judgement of inadequacy, and become at least satisfactory and often good or even outstanding. Becoming outstanding is just the beginning; sustaining this level of provision should be the goal of every leader.

But I am also concerned about those institutions and providers where there is no improvement, or, in some instances, deterioration. For example, Ofsted reported 553 childcare settings that were good or better at an earlier inspection but are now inadequate, and 168 schools and four colleges which were once good or better and are now inadequate. Of particular concern is the volatility in the quality of children's homes: for example, the 36 children's homes that are now inadequate having once been judged to be good or better. Changes to staffing or management can rapidly have a negative effect on the continuity of quality within homes.

There are messages for the institutions and the support services in this set of data, but there are also messages for Ofsted: early warning systems need to be more finely tuned, picking up more astutely local concerns such as those from parents, or lengthy periods with interim or volatile senior management structures. Inspection needs to be smarter at intervening and flagging concerns before they escalate. The key challenges for Ofsted are to help improve the weakest, to prevent those that are improving from slipping back, and at the same time to recognise and disseminate the features of good practice.



Changing school inspection

This is why earlier this year I published proposals to change school inspection and will go on to make changes in other areas too. In line with our strategic plan, Ofsted must focus inspections on those areas and issues where they will have the most impact on outcomes for children and learners. Good and outstanding schools will be subject to a lighter touch inspection. This will allow us to focus on schools that are coasting and schools that have inconsistent results or are slipping, as well as those that are inadequate. We shall identify these schools more quickly and inspect them more frequently. There is more we should learn from the huge amount of information available to us about the performance of pupils and their schools, and we are also looking to tap more directly into the views of parents and children.

Inspectors are already alert to the issues raised in this commentary. They will continue to investigate whether particular groups of pupils are achieving as well as they should, including those in the most vulnerable circumstances – and indeed, the most able. They will judge specifically how well each school fulfils its duties in terms of equalities and community cohesion, and they will seek evidence of the outcomes for learners in terms of their well-being. Too much teaching is dull, lacking challenge and failing to engage pupils. That is why inspectors will spend more time in classrooms than in recent years, evaluating the quality of teaching and the impact it has on learning. More detailed recommendations on what is needed for the school to move on will invariably focus on the precision of classroom practice. Inspectors will take note of the circumstances of pupils and schools, and will, as now, look closely at measures of progress. But progress is not enough. If we are to increase social mobility and social justice the standards achieved by individuals are crucial for future success in education, employment and training.

Conclusion

This is my first Annual Report drawing on inspection evidence for a complete year across the wide-reaching remit of the new Ofsted: the regulation and inspection of childcare and children's social care, and the inspection of local authority children's services, schools, colleges, initial teacher education, work-based learning, adult education and more.

This report leaves me encouraged by the recognition that so much is going well for so many children, young people and adult learners; but frustrated that there is still too much that is patently inadequate, and too many settings and institutions where the rate of improvement is unacceptably slow. As Chief Inspector, I will focus inspection and regulation directly and proportionately where the need for improvement is greatest. Indeed, in a time of economic uncertainty and financial constraint, it is all the more important that regulation and inspection are able to provide timely and evidence-based recommendations not only to those inspected but also to those responsible for establishing policy and direction for care, education and skills in England.

I will focus inspection and regulation directly and proportionately where the need for improvement is greatest.

Key findings

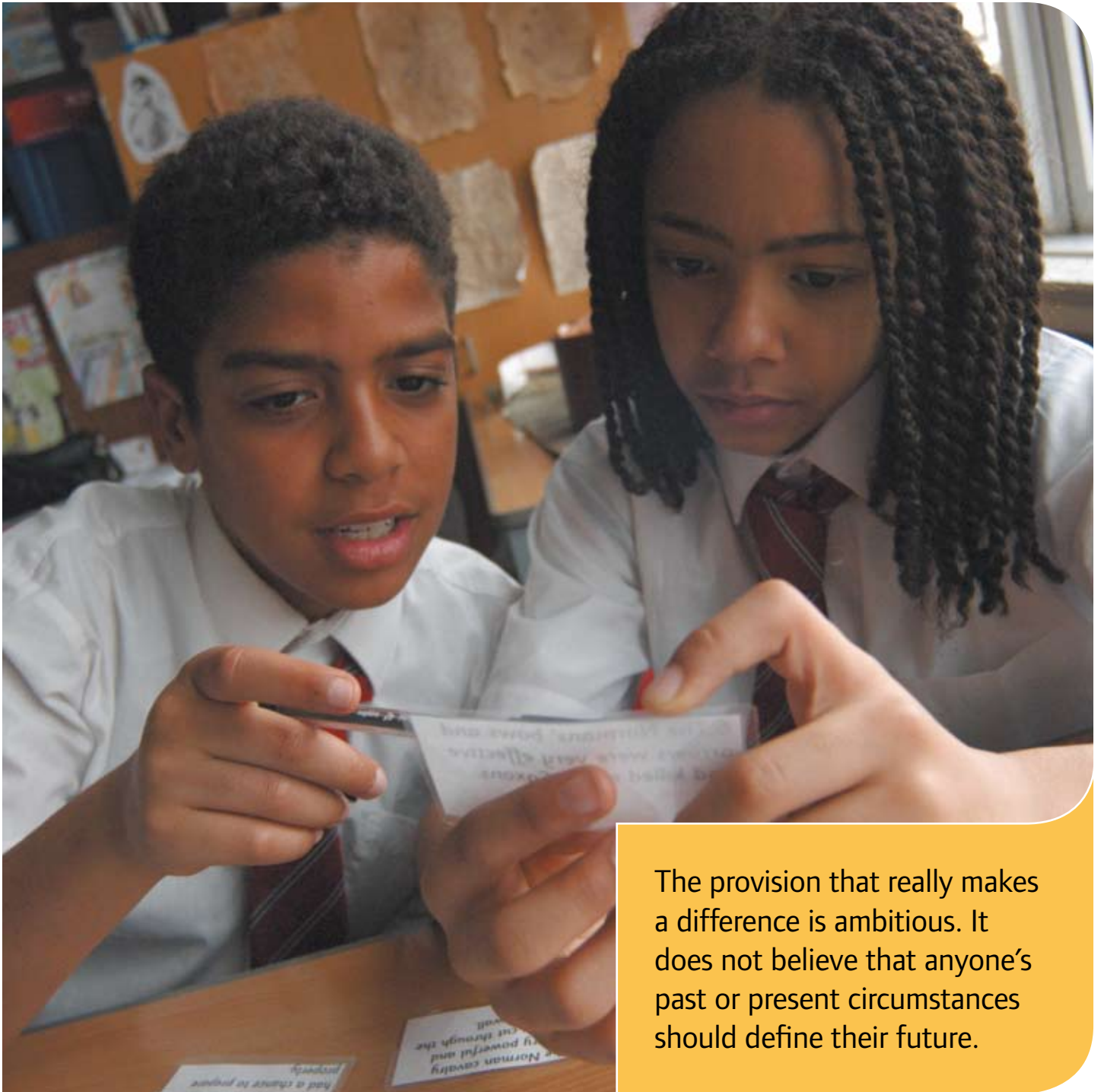


- ✦ A higher proportion of childcare and early education is good or outstanding this year than in 2006/07 but the level of inadequate childcare remains the same at 4%. The quality of provision varies across the sector and between areas. Overall, the quality of childcare is not as good in areas of high deprivation as elsewhere.
- ✦ Over six in 10 providers of childcare and early education inspected are good or outstanding in enabling children to stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve and make a positive contribution.
- ✦ Almost two thirds of maintained schools inspected are good or outstanding, a slightly higher figure than in 2006/07, but 9% of secondary schools and 4% of primary schools are inadequate. The gap between the performance of the best and the weakest schools is unacceptable. Of special schools inspected, 80% are at least good, with 26% outstanding. Nursery schools are particularly effective: 97% of those inspected are good or outstanding.
- ✦ The proportion of pupil referral units which are at least good in their overall effectiveness is similar to that for all schools, while the percentage judged inadequate is slightly higher. However, only 7% of pupil referral units are outstanding; the proportion for schools generally is 15%.
- ✦ The large majority of non-association independent schools inspected meet at least 90% of the regulations.² In just over half these schools, the quality of education provided and pupils' achievement are good or outstanding. However, it is a major concern that about a third of non-association independent schools do not fully meet the requirements for safeguarding pupils.
- ✦ In colleges of further education, success rates for courses have continued to improve and this year an increased proportion of colleges are good or outstanding overall. In six in 10 colleges, students' achievement is good or outstanding. Underperforming colleges fail to set challenging targets and too much of the teaching is no better than satisfactory.
- ✦ Sixth form colleges continue to be highly effective.

² Ofsted inspects all independent schools that are not members of associations affiliated to the Independent Schools Council or Focus Learning Trust. These member schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) or the Schools Inspection Service (SIS) respectively.

- ✦ There has been improvement in several areas of adult learning and skills. The sector is flexible and diverse in providing opportunities for a broad range of learners, some of whom have typically found it difficult to engage in learning or to move into sustained employment. Much remains to be done, however, to overcome the barriers faced by some of the most disadvantaged adults. The sector generally engages well with employers but scope remains for greater involvement of employers in training.
- ✦ Initial teacher education programmes are designed well and trainees are highly motivated and enthusiastic. More should be done to ensure that all trainees promote equality and inclusion in their teaching.
- ✦ Most social care provided for children in children's homes, through adoption and fostering agencies and in residential schools is at least satisfactory overall and two thirds is good or outstanding. However, one in 12 providers are inadequate. This is a cause for concern.
- ✦ Of the children's homes inspected between July 2007 and August 2008, two thirds are good or outstanding. However, 8% of children's homes were inadequate at their most recent inspection. Safeguarding and management are the areas most frequently requiring improvement in inadequate children's homes.
- ✦ National minimum standards and regulations for private fostering arrangements are not yet consistently met, and the attention and resources that local authorities give to monitoring private fostering arrangements vary. This calls into question the ability of some local authorities to improve the quality of this provision.
- ✦ In secure accommodation for children and young people, the improvements reported last year have been maintained, especially in standards of behaviour. Most young people leave with some accreditation in essential skills and there is an appropriate emphasis on raising their attainment in literacy and numeracy. However, they have too few opportunities to gain work-related skills.
- ✦ In adult prisons, while many offenders develop good skills for employment, others have too few opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications.
- ✦ Inspections of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), which plays an important role in safeguarding children's welfare in family court proceedings, have been highly critical of the unacceptable variation in the quality of front-line practice, particularly in private law work.
- ✦ Most councils and their partners contribute effectively to children's safety and welfare and to ensuring that they enjoy their education and achieve well. Educational achievement is improving overall but there is too much variation between local areas and between outcomes for some disadvantaged groups of pupils and their peers.
- ✦ There are often long delays in producing the findings of serious case reviews conducted when children have died or been seriously hurt and child abuse is thought to have been a factor. As a result, the potential for learning from these reviews to improve practice is severely limited. Lessons from recent reviews are not always leading to improvement.

Almost two thirds of maintained schools inspected are good or outstanding... but 9% of secondary schools and 4% of primary schools are inadequate. The gap between the performance of the best and the weakest schools is unacceptable.

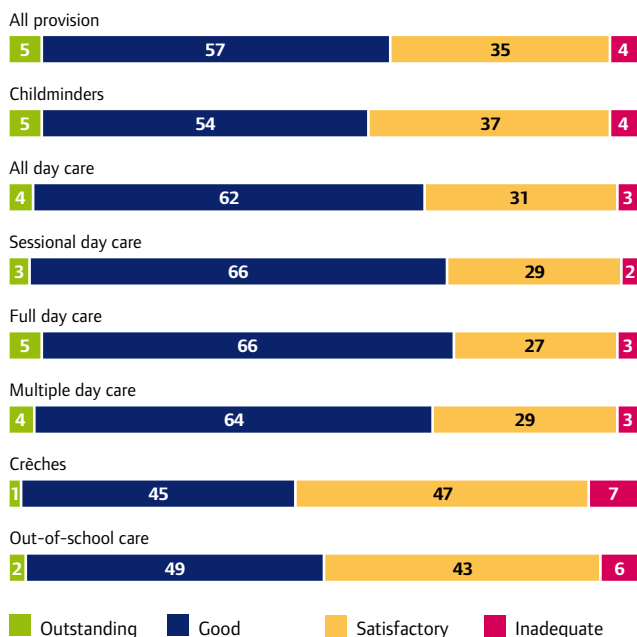


The provision that really makes a difference is ambitious. It does not believe that anyone's past or present circumstances should define their future.

Childcare and early education

During the period from July 2007 to August 2008, Ofsted inspected 31,000 settings, 8,000 of which also provide government-funded early education.

The quality of childcare by type of provider: July 2007 to August 2008 (percentage of providers inspected)

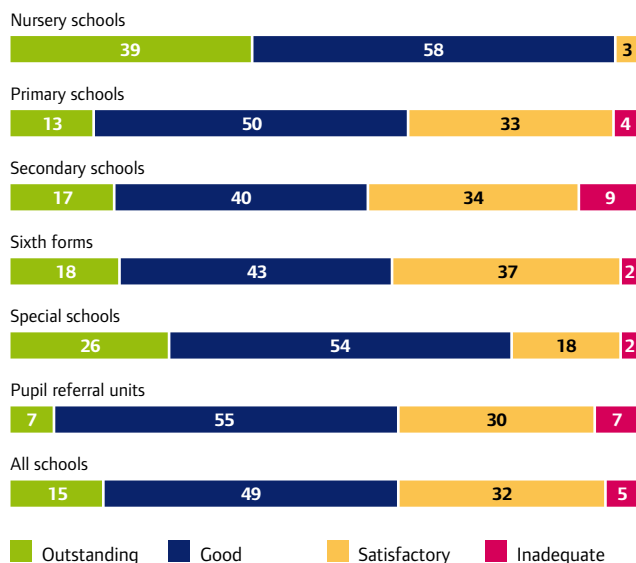


Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Maintained schools

Between September 2007 and July 2008, inspections were carried out in 6,075 primary, 1,164 secondary and 352 special schools.

The overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008 (percentage of schools)



Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Further education colleges

Between September 2007 and June 2008, there were 72 inspections of general further education or tertiary colleges, 33 of sixth form colleges, two of higher education institutions and six of specialist further education colleges.

Overview of colleges, excluding independent specialist colleges, inspected between September 2007 and June 2008 (percentage of colleges)

Overall effectiveness



Capacity to improve



Achievement and standards



Quality of provision



Leadership and management



■ Outstanding
 ■ Good
 ■ Satisfactory
 ■ Inadequate

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Adult learning and skills

Overall effectiveness of work-based learning providers inspected between July 2007 and August 2008 (number of providers)

	Work-based learning
Outstanding	16
Good	133
Satisfactory	90
Inadequate	18
Total	257

Overall effectiveness of adult and community learning providers inspected between July 2007 and August 2008 (number of providers)

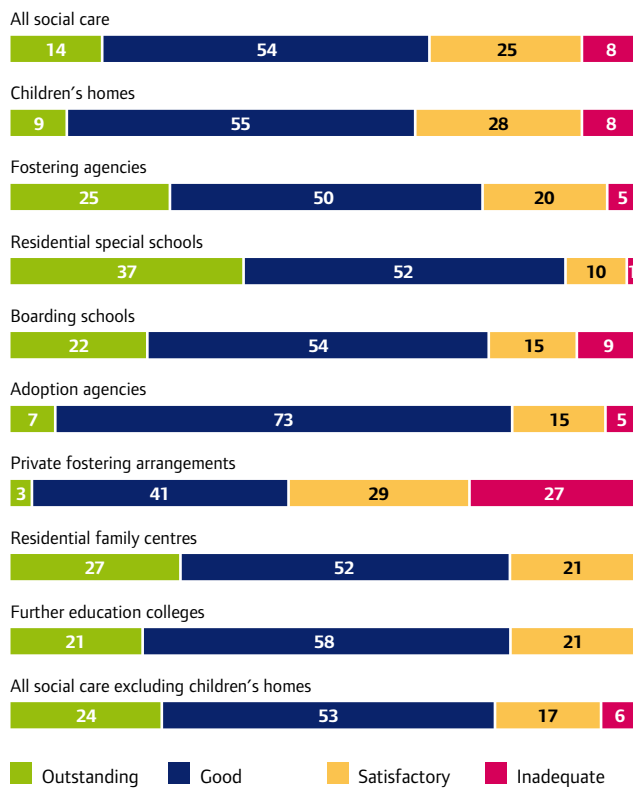
	Adult and community learning providers
Outstanding	3
Good	17
Satisfactory	22
Inadequate	7
Total	49

Children's social care

During the period 1 July 2007 to 31 August 2008, inspectors made 4,801 inspection visits to 2,732 providers. These included 1,838 children's homes, 185 boarding schools, 19 further education colleges, 196 residential special schools, 33 residential family centres, 341 fostering agencies, 60 adoption agencies, 59 private fostering arrangements in local authorities and one adoption support agency.

With the right educational provision and social support around them, children and young people from poor families can reach high standards, overcoming initial disadvantage to achieve personal success.

Quality of care at most recent inspection of providers inspected between July 2007 and August 2008 and active at 31 August 2008 (percentage of providers)

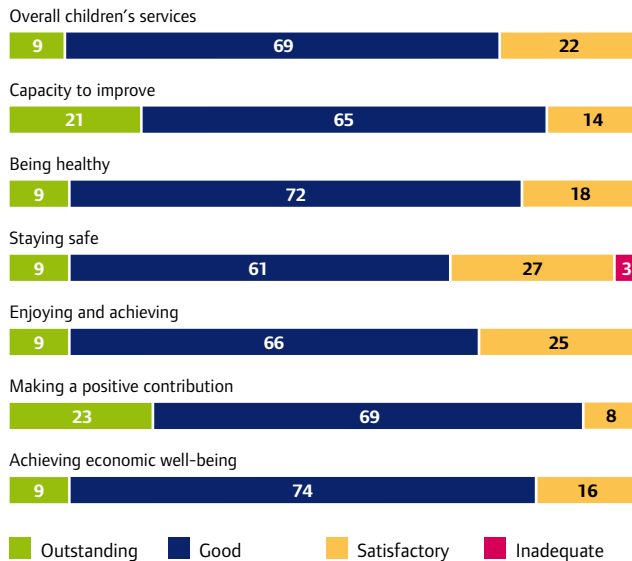


Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Children's services in local authorities

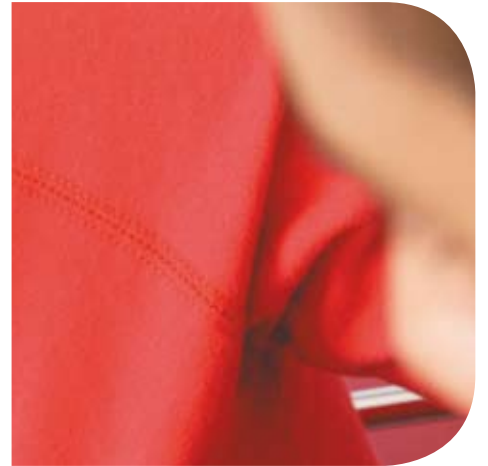
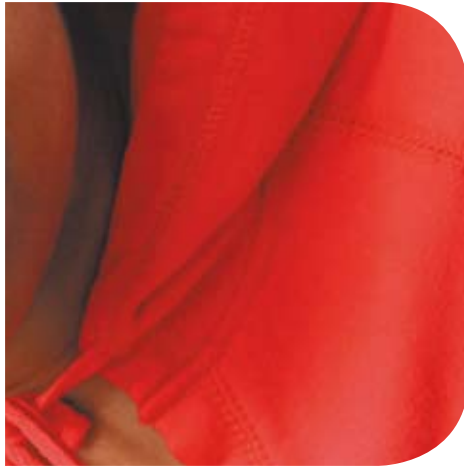
In 2007/08 Ofsted published 44 joint area reviews of children's services in local authority areas.

Annual performance assessment outcomes for 2007
(percentage of local authorities)



Percentages are rounded and may not add exactly to 100.

We have a particular responsibility as a society to ensure that services for children, young people and their families whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable – particularly children in care or custody – are as good as possible.



- ✧ Improving life chances
- ✧ Safeguarding children
- ✧ Skills for working lives



Improving life chances: outstanding education and social care

Where providers of all kinds promote and sustain excellence, particularly from a previous base of inadequate performance, inspection identifies common factors, including:

- ✘ leadership which establishes a clear direction for change, takes tough decisions, sets the right pace for sustained progress and earns the commitment of staff
- ✘ an ethos that expects success and promotes ambition, combined with leadership which sets out what 'outstanding' looks like
- ✘ objective and rigorous self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, conducted with service users and staff and tested by inspection
- ✘ careful implementation of a plan that includes the building of capacity for delivery and a strategy for improvement, and ensures that targets are monitored
- ✘ dialogue and feedback to ensure that needs are being met, both for the individual users of a service and for the wider community
- ✘ awareness that unless external support is carefully matched to individual circumstances and rigorously evaluated, it can create more problems and, at worst, slow the pace of improvement.

Where providers significantly enhance the life chances of those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, inspection invariably identifies common factors, including:

- ✘ focusing on children, young people and adult learners as individuals, listening and responding to them, being well informed about their specific needs and ensuring they make progress
- ✘ involving parents and carers as fully as possible in securing young people's health, well-being and education
- ✘ concentrating intelligently first on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and then on wider skills such as communication and independent learning
- ✘ setting high expectations, and teaching a curriculum matched to the needs of the young people
- ✘ providing an accurate assessment of learning, and then activities designed to promote rapid progress
- ✘ for looked after children, doing all the important things well, spanning social care, health, education and day-to-day personal care.



- ✧ Focus on children, young people and adult learners
- ✧ Involve parents and carers
- ✧ Concentrate first on basic skills
- ✧ Set high expectations

Safeguarding children

On behalf of eight inspectorates, Ofsted led the 2008 joint chief inspectors' review of arrangements to safeguard children and young people. The main findings below draw on findings across the range of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory work. This includes joint area reviews and other joint inspections spanning a wide range of services, including schools, children's homes and fostering and adoption services.

Main findings

Safeguarding children highlights the improvements in safeguarding since the previous report in 2005:³

- ✦ The framework within which public services safeguard children has been strengthened. The new Local Safeguarding Children Boards are well established with a clearer statutory basis from which to deliver their local plans. Joint working between services for children and young people has improved and has resulted in the provision of more preventative and earlier intervention services. Local services now show a clearer focus on the wider safeguarding needs of children and young people in addition to child protection work. This has resulted in better coordinated and more successful strategies to reduce risks to children in their homes and communities, where most children feel safe and are safe.
- ✦ The provision of targeted services to deal with specific issues is increasingly effective. They include services provided by children's centres and programmes to tackle substance misuse, teenage pregnancy and the effects of domestic violence. There have been tangible improvements in aspects of services for some particularly vulnerable groups. These include: better stability in placements for looked after children;

for children who have run away, greater attention to reintegrating them into schools and children's homes when they are found; more effective assessment of the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and more widespread provision of targeted services for children from minority ethnic groups.

- ✦ Nearly all local authorities have revised their child protection procedures in line with new guidance. Access to procedures and guidance to staff is good across the majority of agencies. The management of front-line practice has improved. Most local authorities have established clearer thresholds for access to children's services. Almost all local authority child protection services are judged satisfactory or better.

Safeguarding children also clearly identifies those aspects where further improvement is still required:

- ✦ Local Safeguarding Children Boards have yet to secure participation from all partner agencies, give sufficient priority to targeting particularly vulnerable groups of children and demonstrate more clearly the impact of their work.
- ✦ Effective partnerships are yet to be consolidated as many Children's Trusts are at an early stage of development. In particular, a shared understanding of safeguarding is still lacking between children's social services and parts of the criminal justice system.
- ✦ Levels of concern about bullying among children and young people remain high. Although most settings where children are cared for or educated, including mainstream and special schools, comply with requirements and regulations for keeping children safe, 7% of children's homes are judged inadequate in this respect.

³ See footnote 1, p.1.



- ✧ The educational attainment of looked after children and their life chances are still unacceptably lower than those of other children. They have too little choice in where they are looked after and too many changes of social worker. Considerable concerns also persist about the welfare of children in secure settings.
- ✧ Local authority areas have made progress towards providing earlier intervention and local preventative services for children and young people but not all children have easy access to these. More still needs to be done, particularly with regard to the development of comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- ✧ Concerns remain that staff in some services are less well equipped than others to recognise and respond effectively to signs of abuse or neglect. This includes some front-line staff in schools and in the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). In addition, the new thresholds for local authority services are not always well understood by staff across partner agencies. Furthermore, the application of thresholds by local authorities varies in response to workload and staffing pressures.
- ✧ Serious case reviews carried out by Local Safeguarding Children Boards and evaluated by Ofsted were judged to be inadequate in around a quarter of cases and there were serious delays in producing them in almost all cases.⁴ These shortcomings limit their value as a means of sharing and improving practice.

⁴ This relates to evaluations of serious case reviews carried out between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008.

Skills for working lives

The commentary on the 2006/07 Annual Report referred to the need to prepare young people and adults more effectively and systematically for the world of work. These main findings are drawn from evidence from Ofsted's inspection of provision related to skills for working lives across a wide range of settings.

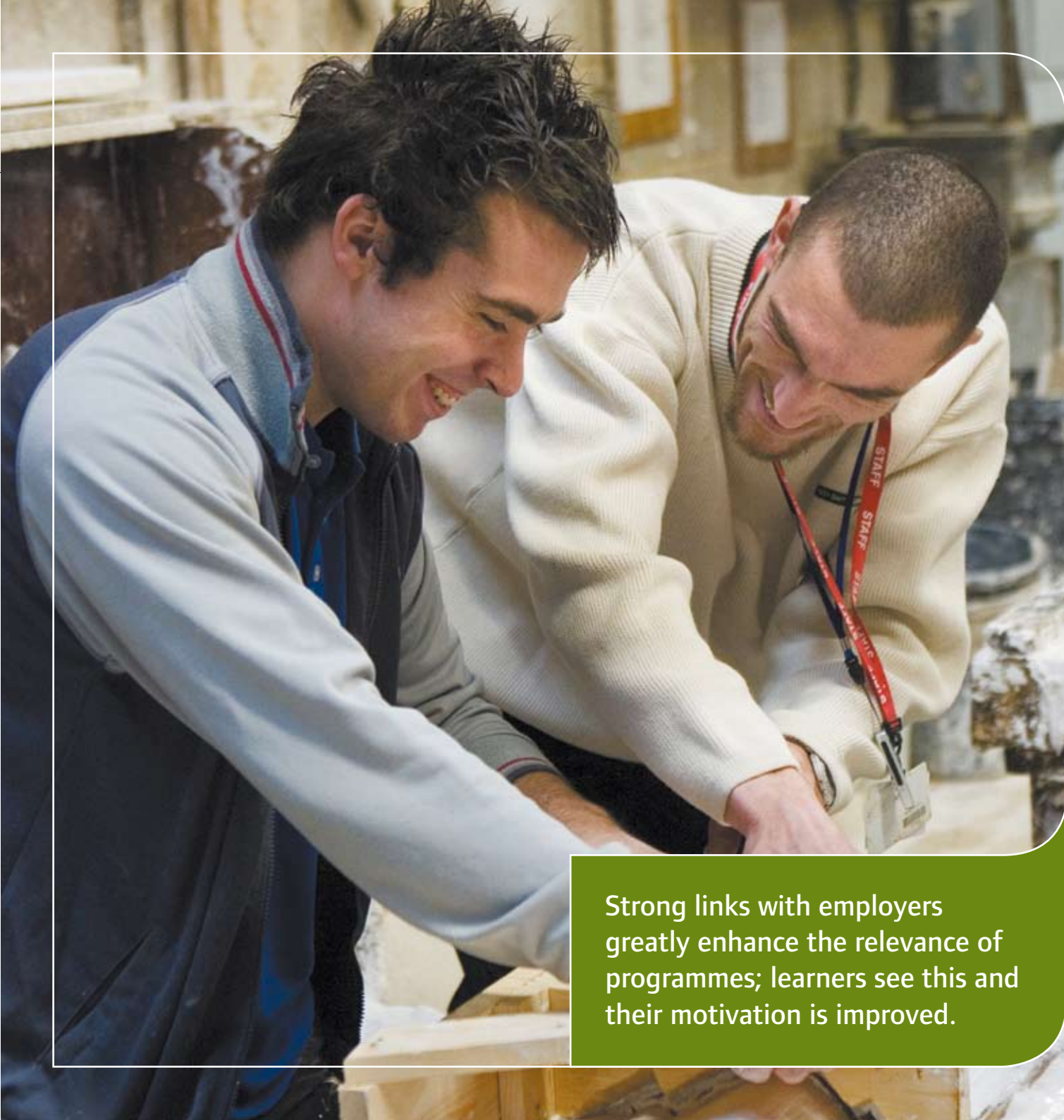
Main findings

The following are key features found in the most successful provision.

- ✦ Strong links with employers greatly enhance the relevance of programmes; learners see this and their motivation is improved.
- ✦ Staff with the knowledge, skills and, in many cases, the professional experience outside education are able to teach work-related skills confidently.
- ✦ Clear and well understood aims, targets, assessment and monitoring procedures ensure that programmes produce tangible outcomes in terms of learners who are better equipped for employment.
- ✦ Well targeted support is provided for learners from disadvantaged groups, with particular attention given to identifying and tackling problems with literacy and numeracy.
- ✦ Learning environments are equipped with high quality resources and industry-standard equipment.

Concerns, however, include the following.

- ✦ Provision across the 14–19 age range is not yet coherent; in practice, discontinuity at the age of 16 still exists for many young people.
- ✦ Equality of access to a full range of relevant post-16 programmes is not yet guaranteed for all young people.
- ✦ The engagement of looked after children, and of those leaving care, in education, employment or training remains low.
- ✦ In provision for adults in employment, too much emphasis is given to accrediting existing skills rather than developing participants' skills and understanding to a higher level.



Strong links with employers greatly enhance the relevance of programmes; learners see this and their motivation is improved.

If we are to increase social mobility and social justice the standards achieved by individuals are crucial.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects registered childcare and children's social care, including adoption and fostering agencies, residential schools, family centres and homes for children. It also inspects all state maintained schools, non-association independent schools, pupil referral units, further education, initial teacher education, and publicly funded adult skills and employment-based training, the Children and Family Courts Advisory Service (Cafcass), and the overall level of services for children in local authority areas (through annual performance assessments and joint area reviews).

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