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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with LEA Members, staff in the education, libraries and museums department and in other Council departments, representatives of the LEA's partners, and representative groups of headteachers. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 86 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 13 primary, five secondary, two special schools, and discussions with the headteacher and chair of governors of another primary school. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits and discussions considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

4. Evidence was also drawn from recent visits to Wakefield schools and analysis of LEA documentation by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI), undertaking national monitoring work.

COMMENTARY

5. Wakefield is one of the largest metropolitan authorities in England. It has partly compensated for the decline of the mining industry locally by taking advantage of its position on major transport networks to develop alternative employment. Nevertheless, unemployment remains above regional and national averages and, although overall levels of deprivation match the national average, there is wide variation across the wards of the authority.

6. Since 1993, Wakefield has progressively re-organised its three-tier system of education, and a single common age of transfer at age 11 will be accomplished in September 2001. The overall performance of its primary schools is broadly in line with national averages and similar LEAs, and has risen faster than nationally at Key Stage 2. GCSE performance remains below national average, but is above that for similar LEAs and has risen faster than nationally. OFSTED inspection evidence shows that the proportion of primary schools judged to be good or very good is in line with the national average, and is well above average for secondary schools. However, the second cycle of OFSTED inspections indicates some slippage in the quality of management and efficiency of secondary schools.

7. The LEA meets its statutory responsibilities. It has effectively supported improvement in its schools as a result of good strategic planning, based on good audit of performance and local need, and through generally well-targeted and differentiated support. The LEA has given high priority to the promotion of inclusion and its services work effectively to meet the needs of its most vulnerable pupils. Good progress has been made towards most of the targets set within the Education Development Plan (EDP); however, progress in developing and implementing a more coherent and comprehensive strategy for 16-19 education has been slow.

8. Much of what the LEA does it does well and its strengths outweigh its weaknesses. Nevertheless those weaknesses are significant in their impact and need to be addressed quickly.

9. The following functions are exercised particularly effectively:

- support for literacy and numeracy in primary schools;
- support for school attendance; and
- support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum.

The following are performed well:

- preparation and implementation of the EDP;
- leadership and effectiveness of services supporting school improvement;
- development and implementation of a strategy for special educational needs;
- support to governors;
- corporate planning and co-ordination of priorities;
- creating effective partnerships and inter-agency collaboration;
- personnel services;
- asset management planning;
- provision of school places;

- provision and support for pupils without a school place, children in public care, and child protection; and
- combating social exclusion.

The following functions are not performed adequately:

- providing financial support to schools;
- ensuring schools are sufficiently well informed purchasers of services;
- defining with schools the LEA's role in monitoring, challenge, support and intervention;
- applications of ICT in school administration; and
- grounds maintenance and contracted buildings maintenance services.

10. Wakefield LEA has a large number of well respected and able staff working within it. It is attempting to establish the new relationship which the Government seeks to promote between local authorities and schools. In a number of respects, not least in its support to schools causing concern, it expects schools to take responsibility for their own improvement.

11. However, in two important respects, the LEA's intentions have not been adequately reflected in its actions. Firstly, it is only relatively recently that monitoring of school budgets by the LEA has begun to be sufficiently rigorous. Progress is being made, but senior officers, elected members, headteachers and governors must share responsibility for the failure of some schools to control their budgets. That failure has, to some extent, undermined the improvements the LEA has sought to promote in the management of schools and their development of greater responsibility.

12. Secondly, there is a lack of transparency in the costs and allocation of some central services. This is not only hindering schools in becoming informed purchasers, but is also reinforcing perceptions in schools that there are inconsistencies and inequalities in the provision of central LEA support and funding to schools. The LEA is also laying itself open to suggestions that it is seeking to maintain a dependency culture in an era of increasing school autonomy.

13. The LEA has shown that it is prepared to make difficult and timely decisions to effect necessary change. This is exemplified in the steady progress made to change the age of secondary transfer to age 11, and the current re-organisation of special schools and the major overhaul of Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy. In other cases, however, the LEA has expected policy to emerge from a consensus view, leading to some decisions not being made quickly enough.

14. The LEA has the capacity to address the issues identified in this report. The immediate challenge for the LEA is to resolve the financial issues in its schools in an open and equitable way, and to support schools in accepting full responsibility for raising standards as autonomous purchasers of services from a range of sources. That task needs to be accomplished within a tight and explicit timescale.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. Wakefield is one of the largest metropolitan authorities in England. It has a high proportion of rural areas and former mining villages alongside a number of larger towns and the city of Wakefield itself. Since the collapse of the coal mining industry and its associated trades, the district has capitalised on its location on major motorway and railway routes and has seen an increase in distribution and service industries. Nevertheless, unemployment remains above the national and regional averages. Overall, levels of deprivation match the national average, but this masks considerable variation; 62 per cent of wards are in the 25 per cent most deprived nationally.

16. The overall proportion of pupils in primary and secondary schools entitled to free school meals (FSM) is below statistical neighbours but broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups (2.8 per cent) is well below the national average (11.7 per cent) but in line with similar LEAs¹. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) in both primary and secondary schools is below statistical neighbours but in line with national averages. The fall in the number of statements between 1996-99 has been greater than nationally. The proportion of pupils in special schools is slightly lower than nationally and regionally.

17. In January 2000, Wakefield had 45,452 pupils of compulsory school age educated in 130 primary schools, 18 secondary schools, 9 special schools and two pupil referral units (PRUs). All county infant and primary schools provide some education for children under-five and there are 4,942 children below compulsory school age on the roll of maintained primary schools. Since 1993 Wakefield has steadily re-organised its existing three-tier system of first, middle and high schools to a two-tier primary and secondary school system. A single common age of transfer to high schools at age 11 will be achieved in September 2001. Four high schools currently have specialist school status (two technology, one language and one arts college). Post-16 education is principally provided by a tertiary system, involving a college of further education and a sixth form college within the district. Six secondary schools are 11-18; this will reduce to five in September 2001. Wakefield has no former grant maintained schools and no schools have adopted Foundation status. An Education Action Zone (EAZ) comprising five high schools and 13 primary schools has been established, principally serving the North East of the district.

18. Key features of schools' and overall pupil performance (as indicated in the 1999 results of national tests and examinations and provisional results for 2000) are:

- Pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools (as revealed by the LEA's baseline assessment) is below national expectations.
- Overall, attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 is in line with statistical neighbours and national averages in all core subjects. The rate of improvement at Key

¹ Wakefield's statistical neighbours are Barnsley, Doncaster, Durham, North Tyneside, Redcar and Cleveland, Rotherham, St Helens, Stockton on Tees, Tameside, Wigan.

Stage 1 also broadly matches the national figures, but has been greater than the national rate at Key Stage 2.

- attainment at Key Stage 3 in 1999 was slightly below national averages for mathematics and science, and below average for English, but was in line with statistical neighbours in all core subjects. The LEA's provisional figures for 2000 indicate improvements and that all core subjects are now in line with national averages.
- At Key Stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving one A*-G and five A*-G GCSE or GNVQ equivalent grades in 1999 was above that for statistical neighbours and broadly in line with national figures. The proportion of pupils achieving five A*-C remains below the national average, owing principally to the relative performance of boys, but results have improved faster than nationally.
- The percentage of vocational qualifications attained at 16 is well above statistical neighbours and nationally.
- At 18 the average points score for pupils entered for two or more A-levels and for GNVQ (Advanced) in maintained schools has been below statistical neighbours and national figures; it improved in 2000 and is now in line with the national average.

19. OFSTED inspection data indicates that the quality of Wakefield's primary schools is in line with the national average, and that the overall quality of secondary schools is well above average. The proportion of primary schools judged to be good or very good (70 per cent) matches the national proportion, and is slightly above statistical neighbours (69 per cent). The proportion of secondary schools judged to be good or very good (86 per cent) is well above statistical neighbours (59 per cent) and the national average (66 per cent). Evidence from the third of secondary schools that have been inspected more than once indicates that, whilst further improvements have been made in the quality of education provided and schools' climate, the quality of management and efficiency has not been maintained and is now slightly below average. Attendance in both primary (94.1 per cent) and secondary schools (91.7 per cent) is above that for statistical neighbours and in line with the national average; levels of authorised and unauthorised absence are below average. Permanent exclusions are below the national average in primary and secondary schools. Exclusion rates for boys are below average in primary schools but slightly higher than the national average in secondary.

20. At the time of the inspection, one primary school was in special measures. Two schools and one Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) had been removed from special measures. Ten schools had been declared by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses and one other had been formally identified as underachieving. Seven schools continued to be designated as having serious weakness. The LEA had identified a further seven schools as causing concern and 'at risk' and was closely monitoring their performance.

Funding

21. The resources per pupil in Wakefield are the seventh lowest among metropolitan authorities nationally. In the primary sector, the resources per pupil in Wakefield in 2000/01 are £2,314, compared with the metropolitan average of £2,460. In the secondary sector, the resources per pupil in Wakefield are £2,982 compared with the metropolitan average of £3,170. Until 1995/96, the local authority spent above the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for education. Following that, however, the Council's overall financial position worsened and, since 1997/98, the LEA has spent at SSA (see table).

Actual or budgeted spend against SSA:

	Actual 1995/96	Actual 1996/97	Actual 1997/98	Budget 1998/99	Budget 1999/2000	Budget 2000/01
Budget/ actual (£M)	113.3	114.7	111.8	122.9	128.9	135.5
SSA (£M)	106.4	111.6	111.5	122.8	129.0	135.5
Budget/ actual As % of SSA	106%	103%	100%	100.08%	100%	100%

22. Wakefield delegates a lower than average percentage of its education budget to schools. In 1999/00, it delegated 77.9 per cent compared with the metropolitan average of 82.1 per cent. For 2000/01, delegation increased to 82.3 per cent. This exceeds current Government targets but is still below the metropolitan average of 84.9 per cent.

23. Central administration costs are lower than the metropolitan average (£30, compared with £48 per pupil). Other strategic management costs are also lower (£22, compared with £33 per pupil). The major areas where expenditure is higher than average are:

- special educational needs where the central expenditure is £186 per pupil, compared with a metropolitan average of £143 per pupil;
- school meals where no primary schools have opted for delegation.

24. The Council has been successful in bringing in additional resources into education. For many years, capital spending on school buildings has been given a high priority by the Council. Reorganisation schemes have enabled additional investment to take place, and the resources per pupil obtained through the New Deal for Schools have been in the highest quartile for metropolitan authorities. A Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme is being developed to replace one defective school building and to repair other schools. Extra resources have been brought in through a variety of initiatives, including Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), European Social Fund (ESF), neighbourhood renewal, youth and adult projects and partnership projects with industry, for example in design and technology developments in schools.

Council structure

25. Wakefield Council has 63 members, of whom 55 are Labour, six Conservative, one Liberal and one Independent. In 1998 the Council anticipated legislation, and re-organised itself to meet Government proposals for modernising local government, by adopting a cabinet structure. The cabinet meets weekly and consists of nine members, including a representative from the leading opposition party. Political responsibility for education rests with the cabinet committee member for education, assisted by the cabinet member without portfolio. There are six scrutiny panels, including one for education and lifelong learning. Panels are chaired by members of the leading political party and, as a result, are too easily perceived as lacking teeth; the authority will be reconsidering their role once legislation is in place.

26. The Council has acted positively to ensure that new arrangements do not curtail the involvement of elected members and other groups in the decision making process. Cabinet meets separately every month as an extended cabinet education committee, involving representatives of parents, the dioceses and professional associations, to consider purely education issues. The authority is considering establishing an education advisory board (EAB), to act as a forum for consultation on major education policy and strategic budget issues.

The Education Development Plan

27. The Education Development Plan is based on a detailed audit of strengths and weaknesses, and provides a firm base for supporting school improvement. Consultation was satisfactory. Eighty per cent of the schools surveyed for this inspection judged the clarity of the EDP, its relevance and the process of consultation to be satisfactory or better.

It identifies eight priorities:

- to raise standards in literacy;
- to raise standards in numeracy;
- to improve the use of, and attainment in, information technology;
- to promote high standards of expectation and achievement in early years;
- to improve the curriculum for special educational needs;
- to raise attainment and achievement through improving the 14-19 curriculum;
- to support and develop high standards in the arts; and
- to improve leadership and management and the quality of teaching.

28. National priorities are appropriately addressed. The inclusion of the arts as a priority, and a cross-cutting activity to raise boys' achievement, reflect issues emerging from the audit of performance and provide an appropriate local dimension to the EDP and school improvement strategy. The action plans for the activities within each priority show appropriate links to other service plans. The cost of the school improvement programme per pupil is similar to the average of other metropolitan authorities and to the national average.

29. The EDP has some weaknesses. Access to support for EDP activities is agreed at the annual review between the LEA and the school, although this process is not clearly enough set out in the EDP or adequately understood by all schools.

Whilst the target setting process within the EDP is sound, the original targets are below what has been achieved. Specific criteria for the identification of schools causing concern are not included; these criteria are currently being developed.

Progress in implementing the Education Development Plan

30. There are good arrangements for monitoring the EDP. Each activity area is monitored termly by its manager, who reports to a steering group that includes headteacher representation. Each priority area and the whole EDP are reviewed every six months. Comparisons with similar LEAs and with national averages are used where appropriate. The review is contained in the advisory and inspection service annual report and service plan to be issued to all schools during the Spring term 2001. It sets out progress in each activity area, and identifies where progress has not been sustained and further development is needed. For example, activities to support further improvements in attendance and behaviour have now been included in the EDP, following the recent review.

31. The range and scope of the activities within the EDP are ambitious, but progress in implementing the EDP has been good in seven of the eight EDP priority areas. However, whilst the broad targets to improve achievement and staying-on rates 14-19 have been met, there has been limited progress in developing the priority for a coherent and comprehensive 16-19 strategy for education and training across the district.

32. Considerable progress has been made towards the EDP targets for 2002. The 2000 Key Stage 2 results in English have risen by fourteen points since 1998, and are now seven points below the 2002 target. The equivalent results in mathematics have risen by seventeen points and are now just four points below the 2002 target. GCSE results in 2000 have met the target set for 2001. Whilst this reflects a high level of success, it also reveals a lack of challenge in the original targets set by some schools and the LEA. Aggregated schools' targets for 2000 in the EDP did not fully meet the LEA's targets, and both have been exceeded by results. Good progress has been made in reducing exclusions, and the 2002 target has already been passed. The level of unauthorised absence in primary and secondary schools matches or is very close to the targets set for 2000.

The allocation of resources to priorities and Best Value

33. A failure to review the schools' funding formula, continued budget problems in some schools arising from past lack of control over deficit budgets and the lack of clarity on the costs of some services provided for schools mean that, overall, the LEA's performance in allocating resources to its priorities is unsatisfactory. These weaknesses have made the budget consultation process with schools more difficult.

34. Progress is being made in addressing these issues. Examples of effective prioritisation include its support for early years, lifelong learning, and targeting of support for social inclusion initiatives. The LEA is using data increasingly effectively to target resources to most of its school improvement priorities and its mechanisms for monitoring the use of these resources are improving. Nevertheless, key weaknesses have outweighed these strengths.

35. The LEA's failure to take sufficiently decisive action on school budget deficits has caused significant problems within many schools. Deficits rose rapidly in 1996 and 1997, when real levels of resources in schools declined. By March 1998 there was a cumulative net deficit of £2.29 million. At that time, the LEA failed to ensure that schools took the decisions necessary to control their budgets. Two secondary schools in particular seriously mismanaged their budgets. The LEA eventually took the action needed.

36. Half of the secondary schools were projected to have individual deficits of greater than £150,000 by 31 March 2000. Twenty primary schools were forecast to have deficits of greater than £10,000 by the same time. For the most part these problems are linked to high staffing costs and in some cases to overstaffing by schools.

37. Progress is being made in reducing budget deficits. In 1998/99, the Council took a firm decision to reduce deficits, with a target of a balanced budget by 2001/02. Since then a combination of increased resources for schools and joint work between the LEA and schools has begun to turn the situation around. By 31 March 1999, deficits had stabilised at £2.39 million. The cumulative deficit was reduced to £1.255 million by 31 March 2000. This was primarily as a result of the use of LEA contingency resources and under-spend in the education, libraries and museums department at the end of the financial year, arising from more successful control of other problem areas of spending in the department. Individual school recovery plans are beginning to take effect. The cumulative net deficit is forecast to reduce by a further £0.5 million, to £0.73 million by 31 March 2001. However, one secondary and 11 primary schools are still spending beyond their income.

38. The LEA has not materially revised its funding formula since the introduction of Local Management of Schools. The formula reflects historic patterns of provision and does not meet the requirements of the Financing of Maintained Schools Regulations that it should be 'simple, objective, measurable and predictable in effect and clearly expressed'. Schools find it difficult to predict the impact of Government's funding changes on their school budgets. Considerable work was carried out in 1995 on a revised formula but a flawed consultation process with schools resulted in a formula that could not be funded.

39. A revised formula has now been drawn up and is being consulted upon by the LEA. This provides a clearer, more transparent basis for funding, and for managing a phased reduction of deficits in schools that is open to all to monitor and judge progress towards balanced budgets.

40. The authority as a whole is taking Best Value processes seriously. It has established a system for monitoring performance based on Best Value principles and is putting in place a sufficiently robust system for performance management. This system, using electronic distribution of performance information through the local authority intranet, is being piloted in housing and financial services. Performance information is, appropriately, being linked into the budget process and the European quality model used to improve processes for reviewing individual services. The local authority is in the process of revising its programme of Best Value Reviews (BVRs)

as part of the development of the Best Value Performance Plan for next year. This revision will take into account conclusions from internal and external reviews of services and lessons from the first year programme. The timing of the BVR for the advisory and inspection service (AIS) should be re-evaluated as part of this review.

41. No BVRs within the scope of the LEA inspection have yet been completed and it is too soon to judge the impact of the BVR process on education. However, the LEA still has some way to go in ensuring that schools are able to apply the principles of Best Value. Whilst the LEA has met Government deadlines for delegation of the costs of support services to schools, it does not provide schools with sufficient information to help them become sufficiently well informed purchasers. This adversely affects the LEA's overall capacity to judge the competitiveness of services it provides to schools as part of its Best Value reviews.

42. For many services, there is a lack of clear description of the service and its costs and schools are not offered a clear choice of service levels. In the case of the AIS, for example, schools do not have a clear view of the distinction between the services that they are entitled to, funded from central resources, and the additional support that they are able to purchase. In the case of the repairs and maintenance service, all schools have chosen to allow the LEA to continue to manage the resources, but do not have a clear idea of the costs of technical support and contracting services that they obtain from the LEA.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- the criteria for accessing support for EDP priority activities should be clarified with schools, and the methodology for and costs of allocating that support to individual schools made more transparent;

In order to improve its implementation of Fair Funding and Best Value:

- clearer specifications, and information on the costs of LEA services offered to schools, should be developed; and
- information should be provided to schools on alternative sources of services and support.

In order to develop financial autonomy in schools:

- the task of working with schools to eliminate budget deficits should be completed within set timescales;
- a revised funding formula, yielding clear and accurate information on which schools can base budget decisions, should be agreed with schools and introduced in 2001, with full implementation from 2002; and
- improved financial information should be developed, including information on delegated and additional resources, to help schools to effectively manage their budgets.

SECTION 2: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

43. The LEA provides satisfactory support for school improvement. It has provided sufficiently effective support to meet the needs of all but three of the schools visited during the inspection. In just over half the schools visited, the LEA's specific support for its targeted school improvement activities, such as school self-review, was good. However, in two of the five secondary schools and one of the special schools visited, it was unsatisfactory. For the most part, LEA services enable schools to concentrate on improvement. This support has contributed to significant improvements in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 and to steadily improving GCSE results.

44. The AIS provides good support for school improvement. The provision of performance data has improved, although its use is still hampered by slow progress in developing effective electronic transfer of data. Support from personnel services to schools causing concern has contributed to their improvement. Effective collaboration with other departments, agencies, and the EAZ, is enabling the LEA to target its services more effectively to areas of greatest need. This is contributing to combating social exclusion and to helping the LEA's most disaffected and vulnerable pupils to continue with their education. The education welfare service (EWS) in particular makes a significant contribution to this work, and to ensuring that improved attendance supports improved performance. SEN and behaviour support services provide sound support overall, although in a small number of schools inadequate level of support from the education psychology service (EPS) is having an impact.

45. However, weaknesses in support from financial services, the lack of transparency in funding and inadequate management of school budget deficits have reduced the ability of many schools visited to focus upon school improvement and develop sufficient autonomy.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

46. The LEA's strategy for monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools has some strengths, but its implementation, and overall effectiveness, is currently unsatisfactory. Whilst schools visited accepted the principle of the LEA's changing role in discharging these responsibilities, in practice not all headteachers were clear about the precise implications this had for the respective roles of schools and the LEA.

47. Each school is part of a pyramid structure comprising primary, special and secondary schools in an area. This structure provides good opportunities for communication between schools and the LEA. There is good liaison between the AIS and the EAZ to co-ordinate support to schools within the zone. Specific support for individual schools is identified through the annual review and through linking identified and agreed weaknesses with EDP priority activities. This methodology for accessing support from EDP activities, whilst satisfactory, is not set out clearly in the EDP and was not widely understood in the schools visited during the inspection. As a result, there remains too high an expectation in schools that the LEA is able, and prepared, to supply support upon demand.

48. An annual review meeting between the link adviser and the school is used to agree the strengths and weaknesses of the school, the targets to be set and the support that is needed to achieve improvement. This process is relatively new, but the majority of schools visited during the inspection were very supportive and found it helpful for school planning. Whilst the review has considerable potential for supporting school improvement and in encouraging schools to take greater responsibility for their own development, the process does have some weaknesses. The degree of challenge presented to schools by the LEA remains too variable. In some schools visited, targets set have not been challenging enough.

49. There is also a lack of consistency in the extent to which review documents present sufficiently sharp judgements and clear action points, or link the agreed action points back to the school development plan. The agreed review document is submitted to the governing body by the headteacher but, currently, the LEA only provides a copy of this annual review statement to governors if concerns have been identified. Link advisers do, however, complete useful summary sheets for each school which clearly identify aspects of good practice and any areas of concern. These summaries, previously only used within the LEA in its termly review of all schools, are being shared with schools for the first time this year.

50. The LEA's monitoring is based upon sound analysis of a good range of evidence, including OFSTED inspection reports, analysis of data, the annual review with schools and visits to schools by link advisers. The EDP specifies that each school will receive three visits by the link adviser per year. In practice, over and above the annual review meeting, the number and focus of link adviser visits are increasingly differentiated and targeted in the light of monitoring evidence. However, the allocation of adviser support to schools and levels of access to centrally funded adviser time were not clear to the majority of schools visited. This lack of transparency in funding and access, and the absence of information on alternative sources of supply, are adversely affecting the ability of schools to develop the degree of autonomy and increased responsibility for their own improvement that the LEA claims to be seeking to achieve.

51. The LEA reviews progress in all schools termly and identifies those where concerns require closer monitoring. It presently operates a three-stage model to categorise schools in terms of the monitoring, support and possible intervention required. However, these stages are not outlined in the EDP and the LEA has failed to ensure that all schools are aware of their status within this model. A revised and more detailed draft policy for categorisation and intervention now has the potential to draw together the LEA strategy for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention into one coherent and accessible document.

52. Support to schools is provided primarily by the AIS. To provide maximum flexibility, recent appointments to the service have been limited to two years. Currently, forty per cent of the AIS staffing budget is met from time-limited external grants and funding. In addition to four senior advisers, there are six primary advisers, eight secondary advisers and one adviser for SEN, all of whom have link school responsibilities. The service is well led and provides satisfactory value for money. Staff are effectively deployed. Individual targets are agreed within

professional development interviews and their work monitored against EDP priorities. However, there is no formal system of performance management.

53. Overall, the service contains a satisfactory range of expertise. Nevertheless, it is currently assessing whether its present expertise will be appropriate to meet needs in two years time and has embarked upon an internal service review using best value principles. The Best Value Review for the AIS is not scheduled until 2003. Given the increasingly pressing need to identify the service's core functions and role in the context of autonomous schools, and to create greater transparency in the funding and entitlement to AIS support in schools, the scheduled BVR is too late.

Support for the collection and analysis of data

54. The LEA provides satisfactory support to schools for target-setting and the use of performance data. The research and information service (RIS) provides schools with a comprehensive range of useful and relevant data that complements national data. This includes pupils' performance at baseline, at each key stage and at GCSE; attainment is also shown by gender. Schools can use the data to benchmark performance with similar schools within the LEA and against performance nationally. Primary schools find the clarity of the data supplied helpful in analysing progress and setting targets for improvement. The quality of data for secondary schools is satisfactory but the size of the database on which it is based means that many schools find greater value in the DfEE 'autumn package'. Comparative data on the achievement of pupils from ethnic minority groups is collected by the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant working group. However, this is not included in the RIS data sent to schools and its planned inclusion by 2002 is too slow.

55. There remains a wide variation in schools' use of the improving range and quality of data but, overall, target-setting in schools and by the LEA is a growing strength. At the time of the EDP, target setting was based on limited expertise and data, contributing to a general lack of confidence with the process. Visits to schools confirmed some caution in the setting of targets, in some cases publishing forecasts rather than targets. During the spring term of 2000, the LEA revisited targets with schools in order to assess, and in some cases increase, the degree of challenge underlying them, taking into account the rise in standards in 1999 and the impact of national initiatives such as 'booster classes'. Provisional results for 2000 indicate that the LEA's Key Stage 2 targets have been overtaken.

56. Target-setting is effectively built into the annual cycle of school self review. Training and guidance in the use of data and target setting have been well received, particularly in primary schools. Training has very recently included work on tracking the attainment of individuals and cohorts within individual schools. However, further development is being hindered because performance data cannot be transferred electronically between schools or between the LEA and its schools. The LEA intends to create a pupil performance data transfer system by September 2001. This time-scale is tight, given that decisions about which administrative system secondary schools will use were still being finalised at the time of the inspection.

Support for literacy and numeracy

57. Support for literacy and numeracy is very good.

58. In 1999, the results of National Curriculum tests in English at the end of Key Stage 2, show that pupils' achievements were in line with the national average. This represented a rise of nine percentage points, the third highest in the country. Provisional figures for 2000 indicate a further rise of five per cent. In seven of the ten primary schools visited, the percentage of pupils reaching level 4 or above had increased. If this rate of improvement is maintained, the LEA is on line to meet its target of 81 per cent in 2002. Targeted work to raise standards amongst boys in primary schools has contributed to some gains in reading and the focus has now shifted, appropriately, to writing.

59. In mathematics, pupils achieved in line with the national average in 1999. Results rose by 14 percentage points, the sixth highest rise in the country. Provisional results for 2000 show a further improvement in standards, with 72 per cent of pupils achieving level 4 or above. In six out of ten primary schools visited, results had improved. The LEA is well on course to meet its 2002 target of 76 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 or above.

60. Attainment in English and mathematics is improving at Key Stage 3. In 1999, 58 per cent of pupils reached Level 5 and above in English compared to a national average of 64 per cent. In mathematics, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 and above was below the national average by three percentage points. Provisional LEA figures for 2000 indicate improvement in both subjects. The LEA has been selected to take part in the national 'Transforming Key Stage 3' pilot. There is a good outline action plan, which recognises the need to raise the level of boys' attainment, to ensure coherence with the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) in primary schools, and to work closely with the EAZ. Secondary schools have been kept well informed of developments in both national strategies. Focused literacy work has taken place in five targeted high schools, together with 23 partner primary schools.

61. The management of the implementation of the NLS and NNS is very efficient and highly effective. The LEA gives a high priority to both strategies. There is a clear management structure with roles and responsibilities explicitly defined and understood by all. Consultants are effective, and their expertise, knowledge and practical advice were praised during school visits. There is effective communication between the literacy and numeracy teams, link advisers, and related EAZ support staff. The quality of training has been good, and sessions have been well attended. Clear criteria have been used for the identification of schools for intensive support and this group of schools has made significantly greater gains in attainment at Key Stage 2 than non-intensive schools.

62. Annual NLS action plans have been increasingly refined to address local needs and identify curricular targets. The NNS action plan and curricular targets identified for improvement have been updated to include all relevant national developments. The development of literacy and numeracy is well integrated into relevant LEA priorities for school improvement in the EDP, and into wider strategies to support lifelong learning. Related initiatives include, for example, the setting up of

family literacy projects in seven primary and two secondary schools and support for schools to achieve the Basic Skills Quality Mark. There are also constructive links with on-going LEA work in music related to the use of 'big books' to enhance and support learning in literacy.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT) in schools

63. The LEA provides very good support for curriculum use of ICT. Overall strategic planning for ICT provides a comprehensive framework for the development of ICT in schools and as part of wider corporate developments such as lifelong learning. The strategy is underpinned by clear audits of performance and provision. Schools surveyed rated support for curriculum ICT more highly than in the majority of LEAs surveyed so far. The LEA's own monitoring evidence indicates that four out of every five schools involved in the implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) believe they are receiving value for money. Inspection evidence confirms schools' views.

64. Attainment and levels of provision were both well below national averages in 1997: the EDP rightly identified a priority to raise levels of attainment and improve the use of ICT across the curriculum. There have been very significant improvements in standards; for example, Key Stage 3 attainment has risen far more rapidly than nationally, and is now in line with the national average. In the same period, the proportion of pupils gaining IT accreditation at the end of Key Stage 4 has risen from eight per cent to 29 per cent. Performance targets have now been raised in both the EDP and ICT Strategic Plan.

65. The NGfL initiative has been very effectively integrated into the LEA's wider strategy and programme. The decision to phase implementation of NGfL over four years was based on clear and appropriate criteria and effectively linked to schools' individual development programmes. Implementation has been well planned and well managed. By November 2000, all secondary and special schools and around three-quarters of primary schools were connected to the Internet. 'Face to Face', an innovative computer aided design and manufacture project developed jointly by the LEA and industry, is attracting national attention.

66. For the most part, LEA training and New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training are satisfactorily integrated. Schools have been sufficiently well informed and are generally happy with the training they have received. The Wakefield web site is beginning to provide a comprehensive range of curriculum support materials, but not all schools visited who were already in the NGfL scheme were regularly using these materials. The monitoring and evaluation of NGfL and ICT related EDP initiatives are strengths of the LEA's planning and implementation, and are used to target resources effectively.

67. The LEA strategy appropriately links curriculum developments with the use of ICT for management and administration in schools. Wakefield has developed its own administrative ICT package. However, developments have not kept pace with those supporting the curriculum and support for administrative ICT is unsatisfactory overall.

68. The LEA has consulted regularly and extensively with schools over the last six years on the administrative software that they would like to use in the future, including commercial alternatives. Those consultations have not resulted in a clear view. As a result, while some improvements have been made, uncertainties about software to be used have delayed the development of electronic transfer of information between schools and the LEA. This is just beginning to develop, but schools, and different sections of the education department, vary in their ability to transfer information electronically. Wakefield is further behind than many LEAs in this respect. The LEA has set a deadline of September 2001 for the necessary systems to be in place to facilitate satisfactory transfer of data.

Support for schools causing concern

69. The LEA's support for schools causing concern is sound and improving. The proportion of Wakefield schools judged by OFSTED to require special measures or to have serious weaknesses is lower than average; all schools in these categories have made the progress required. The EDP sets out clear procedures, once a school is placed in special measures or is identified as having serious weakness. However, the criteria by which the LEA identifies schools causing concern are not stated in the EDP. The LEA presently has seven schools identified where it has its own concerns. These schools are monitored regularly to assess their capability to improve and reports are made to the governing body. However, once again, the process and criteria for identification are not understood by all schools.

70. There have been weaknesses in the past in the LEA's knowledge of its schools and in early identification of concerns. In some cases, action was not swift enough once problems were detected. However, the identification of concerns and subsequent support to schools have improved, largely as a result of the availability of better data and sharper monitoring by link advisers.

71. Once a problem is identified, the support to schools causing concern is effective. The LEA strategy, rightly, is to avoid taking the responsibility for improvement away from headteachers and governing bodies. The LEA has made good use of staff secondments, particularly at headteacher level, to achieve improvement in these schools. Effective support has been given to governing bodies through the LEA's personnel service, in making necessary staff changes. The lists of school causing concern are reviewed termly within the LEA and progress reports made to elected members.

Support for school management

72. The LEA's support for school management varies from good to unsatisfactory. Strengths outweigh weaknesses and, overall, support is satisfactory.

73. Progress in the specific EDP priority activities to improve leadership, management and the quality of teaching has generally been good. The quality of much of the LEA's professional support for senior managers is good. However, the LEA has made limited progress in addressing its expected role in disseminating good practice. Good practice is identified by AIS staff and through the annual review process, but information it is not easily accessible to schools. The EDP target to

create a staff development agency service, incorporating other sources of supply, has also not been met. This, combined with shortcomings in the transparency of information on the costs of services, and in aspects of financial support, is curtailing the ability of some schools to manage as increasingly autonomous institutions.

74. The LEA supports the development of senior managers through the National Professional Qualification for Heads (NPQH) and the Leadership Programme for Serving Heads (LPSH). Substantive new headteachers are offered a mentoring programme, and regional support is available through the HEADLAMP scheme. A key element of the training and consultancy work of the AIS has been to support the development of school self-review, based on the OFSTED training package. This training has been effective, and schools visited during the inspection rated it highly. Several high schools have usefully extended this training to middle managers to support developments in target setting and in monitoring the quality of education and teaching within the school.

75. There is a broad and relevant in-service training programme. This is managed through a detailed business plan and is provided on a purchased basis to schools. The programme is created from analysis of school development plans, the annual reviews in schools, and from national initiatives. Good curriculum and professional support has been given to schools for the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Support from other partners, agencies and business is contributing to curriculum and professional development in areas such as personal and social education, and in the development of key skills and the design and technology curriculum in high schools. The LEA meets its statutory duties in relation to religious education and there is a good working relationship with the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education.

76. The NLS and NNS initiatives and associated advisory support have helped teachers to review and improve their teaching. Support for newly qualified teachers is good and all schools within Wakefield LEA purchase the newly qualified teachers' support programme. Support for teaching gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of development and is identified as a priority in the 2000-1 AIS service plan. Four summer schools were run in 2000. No register of gifted and talented pupils has yet been compiled.

Support for governors

77. Support for governors is good and represents good value for money. It is justifiably held in high regard by schools and their governing bodies. The clerking service, purchased at full cost, is expert, well organised and very responsive to specific school needs. Briefing notes and advice are succinct and intelligible; they ensure that governors are well informed. Vacancies on governing bodies are manageable and there is a prompt response from the LEA to notification of vacancies. The LEA provides two types of training: general course provision as part of the LEA package, and increasingly popular bespoke training, held at the school at a time determined by governors themselves. Courses on target setting, involvement in AIS analysis of school improvement, training on school self-review, training for performance management and, not least, training on SEN inclusion and the review of pupil exclusion strategies, have all proved valuable. The support and challenge

for governors of schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses are particularly effective.

Support for early years education

78. The LEA's support for early years education is satisfactory overall, with a number of strengths. Children's attainment on entry to school is below the national average, particularly in relation to the development of social and language skills. OFSTED reports show that in almost all schools pupils in the early years make good or satisfactory progress and LEA evidence shows that all voluntary and private settings have improved between their first and second inspections. Support for early years education in the EDP aims to promote high standards of achievement in early years settings based upon an appropriate early years curriculum. The review of the EDP indicates satisfactory progress with most activities, but some slippage on those targeted on improving parental involvement, owing to staff shortages.

79. The Early Years Development and Childcare Plan meets requirements. Links to other partnerships and agencies are clearly identified. Additionally, there is a very useful and accessible summary document. The plan clearly reflects links to other corporate priorities such as family learning and related issues of access, but the relationship between the plan and the EDP is not sufficiently explicit.

80. The LEA and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) have fulfilled their duty to provide sufficient places for all 4 year olds, predominantly in the maintained sector. Owing to a fall in the birth rate, the number of places exceeds demand. The LEA and EYDCP have received funding to extend provision for three-year-olds. The LEA's review of the role of its remaining nursery schools is, therefore, justified and well integrated into the overall partnership strategy. The partnership is developing a quality charter and working with the education department to ensure the involvement of qualified early years teachers in all settings.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- an integrated and coherent policy statement on monitoring, challenge, support and intervention in schools should be produced;
- there should be greater transparency in the funding of, and entitlement to, advisory visits in order to encourage schools to be more responsible for their own improvement;
- easily accessible and clear information on good practice in schools should be provided and used to develop networks of support between schools, and between schools and the LEA;
- the local authority should amend the Best Value Review timetable to enable the present internal review of the AIS to become a full Best Value Review; and
- data on the achievement of ethnic minority pupils should be included in the RIS data sent to schools in 2001.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- uncertainties on the future of administrative ICT systems need to be resolved;
and
- priority should be given to the development of electronic communication between the LEA and schools, and to ensuring effective transfer of pupil data between schools and between differing services.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

81. Overall, the strategic management of education in Wakefield is sound. The Council has a history of commitment to education. In the past, however, that commitment has not always translated itself into sufficiently clear and open policy and actions. The LEA has not shied away from making robust decisions in its re-organisation of schools. However, conflicting priorities, particularly about cuts in education budgets in the mid to late 1990s, and the desire to protect schools from the impact of reduced funding, resulted in some decisions not being made quickly or rigorously enough. In the last two years, the advent of a new leader of the Council and head of paid services has resulted in clearer objectives and a more rigorous monitoring of performance and accountability throughout the Council and its services. For the most part, elected members are sufficiently well informed, decisions on education are taken in a timely way, and communicated to all relevant parties, including schools.

82. Overall corporate planning by the Council is good. The corporate strategic plan 2000-2003: 'Quality Matters' provides a well framed overarching strategy with coherent structures for co-ordinating existing initiatives, strategies and service developments. It focuses on core values of social, economic and physical regeneration, giving a high priority to improving access to education and lifelong learning, and to raising attainment in order to underpin economic regeneration. The plan makes clear the responsibilities of specific departments within the Council, including the education, libraries and museums department, in delivering the corporate agenda and ensuring that individual departmental plans are integrated with the corporate strategy.

83. Progress in implementing corporate and related departmental planning is sufficiently well monitored by the chief officers of the five Council departments and by cabinet members. Lines of communication, responsibility and accountability are now clear, and there are straightforward and pragmatic procedures for co-ordinating the work of different departments. Plans to appoint an officer to co-ordinate corporate development will further strengthen current developments.

84. The organisation and management of the education, libraries and museums department are sensible and straightforward. This contributes towards effective co-ordination and cross-service working to deliver overarching priorities, including the LEA's school improvement strategy. Specific education plans reflect the quality of corporate planning in general. The strategic relationship between these education plans, including the EAZ Action Plan, and the LEA's strategic plan for school improvement (the EDP) is good. The LEA is aware that it will need to reinforce these strategic links further in the new EDP for 2002 onwards.

85. The leadership provided by the LEA is, in the main, effective. Senior officers are respected and schools are generally satisfied with the LEA's knowledge of, and support for, its schools. There is a clear commitment to school improvement. The LEA has attempted to articulate the respective roles of the LEA and schools, the degree of responsibility it expects schools to take for their own improvement, and the

role of the LEA in developing and maintaining that relationship. However, its actions have not always exemplified its intentions.

86. In just over half the schools visited the LEA had provided sufficient and generally effective support for the strategic management of the school; in two schools support was good. In a quarter of schools however, there was a lack of consistent challenge regarding budgets, and a lack of clarity and transparency in the costs of some central services, particularly the support provided through AIS. This was adversely affecting the school's ability to plan and manage its longer-term development and the pace at which it was able to move towards greater autonomy in its relations with the LEA. The period of *ad hoc* solutions by the LEA to individual school budget problems has also resulted in perceived inconsistencies and inequalities in the support provided to schools and in the strategies employed by the LEA in challenging schools to manage budgets more effectively. For a number of schools visited this was adversely affecting their views on the strategic management of the LEA.

87. The LEA's key focus in recent years has been on addressing issues of provision and raising standards within compulsory education. It has provided a firm lead in rationalising educational provision for pupils aged five-16. The LEA is conscious that provision and standards post-16 are also in need of attention. Participation in post-16 education is lower than average. Until 2000, attainment has been lower than average and remains extremely variable across schools. The EDP identifies a priority to raise post-16 achievement by implementing a coherent and comprehensive strategy for education and training across the district. However, progress has been slow, and objectives and targets for 16-19 provision remain largely aspirational. The LEA has successfully created and maintained good partnerships with other providers, including the Learning Skills Council which now has the strategic role of co-ordinating post-16 provision across the region. The LEA plans to begin full consultation on the future of its own post-16 provision early in 2001, but is not offering clear enough strategic direction to the consultation process.

88. The LEA's consultation procedures with schools have some weaknesses. Whilst the great majority of schools visited were clear about the LEA's consultation arrangements, for example through primary and secondary standing committees, their views on the effectiveness of these arrangements varied widely. A third of primary schools and over half the secondary schools visited were unsure of the remit of specific task groups and how, precisely, they operated within the LEA's overall decision making processes. Schools also reported some inconsistencies in the LEA's approaches to consultation and ways in which it constitutes consultative and task groups. Schools surveyed were generally critical of their involvement in decision-making. Some decisions have been delayed because the LEA has failed to take a sufficiently clear lead by proposing informed options and recommendations to guide consultation and decision-making. The LEA is conscious of weaknesses in its communication with schools and has very recently sought to improve its consultation procedures. However, it has not yet formally defined a framework for consultation, so that all partners have a realistic idea of what levels and types of consultation to expect.

89. The LEA is particularly successful in collaborating with other departments and external agencies in order to support its priorities for education, particularly with regard to social inclusion and lifelong learning. The LEA has developed strong links with its partners, including the dioceses. Services are clear about their responsibilities for cross-cutting initiatives, and co-ordination is generally good. Sensible and pragmatic decisions have been taken to co-ordinate and manage the expanding partnerships and multi-agency groups that support national and local initiatives. The Wakefield learning partnership, for example, is taking a leading role in co-ordinating provision and the contributions of all sectors of education and business. It is taking the lead role in liaising with the local Learning Skills Council (LSC) and with the developing Connexions network.

90. Liaison with the health authority, police and probation services is good and has been particularly productive in social inclusion programmes that support disaffected young people in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the district. Relationships with the health trust are not as well developed and are impacting on provision of specialist support for some children with special needs. There is effective co-operation between education and social services at both strategic and operational levels. The LEA has provided positive support for the EAZ since its inception and, in general, is effectively co-ordinating zone initiatives with its own strategic developments and support for schools.

Management services

91. Financial support services are unsatisfactory overall. The performance of these services has been poor. Financial support from the education, libraries and museums department has improved and is now sound, but there are weaknesses in the support provided to schools by other departments. Since deficit budgets have started to be tackled, the financial support service in the education, libraries and museums department has worked well with schools to improve their budget position. Schools value the support that they now provide, this service is tightly resourced and provides sound value for money to schools.

92. There are weaknesses in the support provided to schools by the central services department. There have been problems with the speed of payments of invoices. Problems with loss of staff in the creditors section led to only 49 per cent of invoices being paid within 30 days of receipt, in comparison with the government target of 95 per cent. Performance has now improved and 80 per cent of invoices are being paid within the target timescale. There are frequently problems with the allocation of salary costs to appropriate codes within school budgets. The building maintenance direct services organisation (DSO) accounting system has been too slow and cumbersome resulting in late invoices to schools.

93. Only a small number of schools have their own cheque book in order to operate delegated budgets via their own bank account. The current schools finance system (FIS) does not allow for easy management of both the delegated and additional resources provided to schools. The local authority is aware of the problems that exist and is taking action to address the issues. Changes being made currently include improvement to FIS to include all income and expenditure, speeding up of creditor payments and radical changes to the school funding formula.

94. The LEA provides good personnel support services which give effective support and good value for money to schools. Schools value the casework support that is provided to them to deal with employment issues. Personnel services have worked effectively with AIS to tackle staffing issues in schools causing concern. They have also worked effectively with schools over the last two years to help them to reorganise staffing structures so that they can reduce deficits and remain within budget.

95. Overall, property services are good; asset management planning (AMP) in particular is a strength. The LEA has maintained good stewardship of school buildings and has carried out the asset management process effectively. It has managed to maintain substantial capital investment in school buildings, principally through judicious management of resources released through reorganisation and surplus place removal projects. Over £60 million has been invested in recent years. The LEA is in the top 25 per cent of metropolitan authorities in the extent of New Deal for Schools resources obtained and a PFI scheme is currently being developed. Despite this investment, a number of schools still have serious building problems, due principally to defective systems-built schools constructed in the 1960s and 1970s.

96. The LEA was one of the first to submit required AMP information and has fully met all planning deadlines. The local policy statement was accepted by the DfEE and minor changes suggested to improve the plan have been incorporated into the current submission. Asset management plans have been presented to individual schools and, although consultation processes to establish investment priorities have been established, most schools have preferred the LEA to take decisions over investment.

97. Schools have chosen to pool delegated resources for repairs and maintenance. The LEA still manages the spending on technical support and on repairs. As a result, schools have little control over the cost and quality of the service they receive. Technical support services are satisfactory and provide value for money, but contracted services provided by the building maintenance DSO are still too variable in terms of cost, quality and responsiveness.

98. The school meals and cleaning services are satisfactory. Take-up of school meals by pupils is lower than in many other authorities. This resulted from a poor previous contract which led to an incentive to reduce the number of pupils taking meals. The current management of the service has clear targets to improve the take-up and is taking action to meet them.

99. The grounds maintenance service provided to schools by the public services department varies in quality, and is unsatisfactory in some schools. An increasing number of schools are reviewing their purchase of the contract. The service has not surveyed schools' views and this restricts its customer focus.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- the role of the LEA should be defined more clearly, in consultation with schools, setting a clear timescale and staged targets for securing the relationship it will maintain with its schools, and for supporting schools' moves towards greater autonomy; and
- a framework for consultation should be defined and published, setting out clearly the forms of consultation, and the circumstances in which particular forms of consultation will apply.

In order to improve asset management and buildings maintenance:

- the current arrangements for delegation of repairs and maintenance expenditure, and the extent to which pooling of resources should continue, should be reviewed with schools.

In order to improve grounds maintenance:

- service provision and quality should be reviewed in association with schools, and recommendations acted upon.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

100. The LEA has a good strategy for special educational needs (SEN), which is based upon a very clear set of principles. The eight priorities for development in the SEN action plan support very well the Government's agenda of encouraging greater inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream education. They are reflected in the EDP and there has been evident progress. For the most part the implementation of the strategy is well managed and effectively monitored, but mechanisms for monitoring the future progress of the strategy and communicating that to schools and elected members need sharper definition.

101. The percentage of pupils with statements is in line with national and regional averages. The percentage of pupils educated in special schools is slightly lower than national and regional averages and reflects the LEA's success in including pupils in mainstream schools. A range of resource provision in mainstream schools has been developed for pupils with low incidence special needs, such as sensory impairments. The inclusion of pupils with high incidence special needs, such as moderate learning difficulties in mainstream schools, is working well. The LEA produces a range of useful monitoring data on SEN and links are beginning to be made between the performance data analysed by the AIS and data held by SEN services on pupils' progress.

102. Special schools are currently being reorganised and proposals have recently been approved by DfEE. By 2003 the number of special schools will be reduced from nine to six, and the number of places will be substantially reduced. The number of pupils in special schools outside the LEA has been gradually, but significantly, reduced and plans are in place to continue this process.

103. Services which support SEN provision are generally effective. Schools visited were generally satisfied with the quality of individual support provided by the educational psychology service (EPS). However, widespread concerns were expressed about the impact of recruitment problems on the quantity of EPS provision, particularly in supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Similarly, the limited number of specialist teachers in the hearing impairment service is affecting efficiency. The work of support services is reasonably well focused, but quality assurance measures need strengthening. Schools are not sufficiently clear on the delineation of responsibilities between the LEA and themselves. This is obstructing the LEA's aim of promoting greater school autonomy in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN.

104. The recently established parent partnership scheme has quickly developed its services, and is generally well regarded. Relationships with other agencies, in particular the health authority and social services are good at the strategic level and sound overall. In general, relationships with the health trust are also sound, but there are few agreements for joint funding for key equipment, such as specialist seating or electronic communication aids for pupils with complex needs. The LEA

itself employs speech therapists to ensure that these services are delivered, even when the responsibility rests with health agencies.

Statutory obligations

105. The LEA meets its statutory duties well and there is regular monitoring of performance in this area. Schools surveyed judged the LEA's overall performance of its statutory duties to be broadly satisfactory, in line with schools in other LEAs surveyed. Inspection evidence was generally more positive, although a small minority of schools visited expressed some concerns over the time taken to get the assessment process started. Last year 89 per cent of statements (excluding exceptions) were completed within the required period. The number of assessments has reduced, broadly in line with planned levels. The quality of statements is good, and arrangements for annual and transitional reviews are effective.

School improvement and value for money

106. SEN support to help schools improve is satisfactory overall, with some significant strengths. Special schools surveyed were generally satisfied with the LEA's support. The AIS now provides a range of good support to special schools, but is not able to provide specialist advice on provision for pupils with more severe and complex learning and behavioural difficulties. This limits the capacity of the LEA to assure the quality of some aspects of special school provision. Target-setting has been established in special schools, but is not consistent between these schools, nor with target setting for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

107. Apart from weaknesses in the sufficiency of support from the EPS, support for SEN provision in mainstream schools is generally good. Information made available to schools is helpful. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are well informed, receive a good range of training and have access to a well established network which provides good sources of support. The current approach to self-evaluation of SEN provision is good and well regarded by SENCOs. The resourcing strategy for SEN is clearly linked to increased inclusion, and provision in mainstream schools is generally effective. Support to pupils from learning support and sensory impairment services was at least satisfactory in all but one of the schools visited and was good in over half of these schools.

108. The LEA's strategy is effectively tackling problems of previously escalating costs of SEN and, overall, the LEA is managing SEN funding well. Overall expenditure on SEN is comparatively low. Whilst central expenditure remains high there are clear plans to increase delegation of SEN funds to schools. The current formula for devolving funds to schools is effective, supports early intervention and gives greater flexibility to schools in how they manage and provide support for children with SEN. Schools are held accountable for how they spend their devolved funds, though monitoring of actual provision by schools and its impact on progress and outcomes for pupils needs further development. SEN services are generally effective. Overall, value for money is sound.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:

- systems should be devised for more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the provision for, and progress of, pupils with SEN in mainstream education;
- specific criteria for the role of support services should be developed which clearly differentiate between their responsibilities, and those of schools; and
- quality assurance measures for allocating and monitoring the effectiveness of support services should be strengthened.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

Planning of school places

109. The LEA has managed the supply of school places effectively in both the primary and secondary sectors, and its work provides sound value for money. In recent years reorganisations have been carried out to remove surplus places in both the primary and secondary sector, to move from a three tier to a two tier systems throughout the district, to close an unviable sixth form, and to match special school provision more closely to need. The school organisation committee has agreed the original and revised school organisation plan. The LEA successfully completed the infant class size reduction programme by September 2000 through the addition of 20 extra classrooms.

110. The average size of Wakefield primary schools is in the lowest quartile for metropolitan authorities, as many primary schools in Wakefield serve smaller local communities outside the main urban areas. For the last three years there have been nine per cent surplus places in the primary sector in Wakefield. In January 2000 there were still 12 schools with greater than 25 per cent surplus places. The majority of these schools do, however, serve rural communities. In addition to its programme of area-based reorganisation the LEA is continuing to monitor admissions in areas where primary school populations are falling.

111. There are currently five per cent surplus places in the secondary sector in Wakefield, a significantly lower percentage than in most metropolitan authorities. Two schools have more than 25 per cent surplus places. In both cases, however, the LEA has worked with the school to improve its popularity and review accommodation. Pupil numbers are rising and, as a result, the viability of neither school is threatened.

Admissions to schools

112. The admissions process in Wakefield is satisfactory. The LEA provides satisfactory information to parents about the admissions process. It has also brought forward the admissions timetable, and secondary appeals are now resolved before Easter and almost all primary appeals by June. The LEA manages admissions through a priority system based on catchment areas. The main tensions in the admissions processes relate to pupils who move into the area after the normal admissions cycle has taken place. There is a low number of appeals in both the primary and secondary sectors.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

113. There are very effective tracking and referral systems for children without a school place. Provision is wide-ranging and generally good. Educational support for pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers is effective. External agencies are well used to provide additional or alternative education and training, for example through the Translink project led by the LEA, and involving the local careers and training partnership and the local Further Education (FE) College. Oversight of children

educated at home by their parents covers both academic and pastoral needs and is regularly monitored by the education welfare service (EWS) and behaviour support team (BST) drawing on advice from the AIS as necessary. There is clear evidence of the LEA insisting on a return to school where home arrangements are unsatisfactory, including through recourse to the courts. Hospital and home tuition is sound.

114. The provision for excluded pupils is good, and has improved since the start of this academic year. Significant progress has been made in securing appropriate education for pupils with fixed-term exclusions above 15 days. The LEA is on target to reach the DfEE requirement for full-time education for excluded pupils a year early. Only a handful of excluded pupils have been receiving alternative tuition for longer than a year. The LEA and the local FE College also operate a successful early college transfer scheme to provide disaffected pupils with more vocational educational opportunities. The Key Stage 3 pupil referral unit (PRU) provides effective, temporary, short-term provision to pre-empt permanent exclusions and aims to ensure a return to full-time education in school at the earliest opportunity.

115. There is a well-established paper based information system on excluded pupils and others at risk. Information is readily accessible and well used to monitor provision and the progress of individual pupils. The cost of provision at the PRUs is above average for metropolitan authorities but, overall, the costs of education otherwise than at school are average. The service provided represents good value for money.

Support for behaviour

116. The support provided to schools, pupils and parents in dealing with problems of behaviour is generally effective. It meets statutory responsibilities and provides sound value for money. Levels of permanent exclusions are lower than the national average and over the last three years have been reduced by 40 per cent. The LEA has already surpassed its targets for 2002 and work is in hand to revise the targets and to secure further improvements in the speed of reintegrating pupils into schools. Fixed term exclusions have also reduced, if only slightly. These improvements are underpinned by a good Behaviour Support Plan; this is based on a rigorous audit of need and provides a clear strategy for improvement. Plans and activities are well thought out and their implementation is carefully monitored.

117. The outreach and behaviour support services operate effectively. National resources and strategies, such as the development of in-school provision and the pupil retention grant, have been used well. In addition, the LEA's use of local initiatives, such as the regular joint consultative meetings with secondary schools, and the protocols developed between the LEA and schools on admissions and exclusions, have contributed significantly to improvements. Schools surveyed were mixed in their overall views of behaviour support, judging support for improving behaviour as satisfactory and advice on exclusion procedures as good, but alternative provision for excluded pupils as poor. The picture in schools visited during the inspection was more positive: apart from two schools where access to behaviour support was slow, it was judged to be satisfactory or better.

Support for attendance at school

118. Provision for securing the attendance of pupils at school is very good indeed, and is a strength of the authority. The EWS is very well managed. Its effectiveness is based upon both intelligent use of data and good knowledge of schools, pupils and families. In 80 per cent of schools visited, support for improving attendance was good or better. In addition to securing improved attendance, the EWS plays a crucial role in activities which secure greater inclusion. Expenditure on the service is close to the national average, is well aligned to priorities and provides very good value for money.

119. The levels of attendance and unauthorised absence are very close to or better than national figures in both primary and secondary phases, and both are improving. Very challenging EDP targets are being met and, in consultation with schools, action has been taken to ensure this continues. The EWS meets all its statutory and legal responsibilities fully. Guidance to schools is clear, provides detailed advice on key practices and sets out clearly the respective responsibilities of LEA and schools. Guidance has been underpinned by effective consultation and appropriate challenge by the LEA. Staff are well deployed to support pyramids of schools, whilst retaining sufficient flexibility to provide differentiated support in response to need. The impact of the service is gauged annually through client surveys that include parents, as well as schools.

120. The EWS works effectively to ensure that the rights and interests of some of the most vulnerable youngsters in the LEA are safeguarded and they and their families are actively encouraged to accept their responsibilities. The attendance partnership group, consisting of headteachers, police, EWS, and youth offending team (YOT), meets regularly to identify problems and establish multi-agency ways of tackling them. There is very significant and effective joint working with housing and social care officers on attendance issues. Recourse to the courts is well judged and effectively handled. The EWS has played a key role in developing pastoral support plans and pupil reintegration plans in secondary schools. The existence of the regular joint consultative meetings with schools has helped to tackle pupil absence as well as behaviour issues.

Children in public care

121. Support for children in public care (CiPC) is good, and continues to improve. It meets statutory requirements, and provides good value for money. This area is a corporate priority and this is reflected in close and effective joint working procedures developed between the education and housing and social care (HASC) services. The two services have collaborated effectively on a recently revised policy for CiPC in the light of supplementary Government advice. Wakefield, in partnership with Barnardos, has been designated as a Beacon authority for its support to young people leaving public care.

122. All schools have designated teachers, and joint training is provided by both education and HASC for these teachers and for care workers, foster parents and others involved with CiPC. Data and information on these children is well used; there are clear targets and associated monitoring arrangements for the attainment and

attendance of CiPC. Where appropriate, these are well linked to monitoring of permanent and fixed term exclusions. Link advisers and headteachers have been briefed on CiPC and their targets so that the annual target setting exercise takes account of these children. The LEA and HASC have made good progress in meeting targets for improvement.

Health and safety, welfare and child protection

123. The LEA takes appropriate steps to meet its statutory obligations to protect children from significant harm. Schools surveyed judged advice on child protection procedures as good. The inspection confirmed this picture. Support is effective and provides good value for money. Policies and strategies are clear. Schools' receive good guidance on the management of emergencies in schools, security, on general health and safety issues, and on a wide variety of pupil health and welfare issues. There is a designated officer responsible for the oversight of child protection who is a member of the area child protection committee. Working relationships between services and agencies at both strategic and operational levels are good. The LEA maintains an up to date list of designated teachers, who receive effective training. Visits to schools revealed effective work with HASC, with the newly formed YOT, the crime prevention team and police generally, and increasingly with the Health Action Zone.

Support for ethnic minority children, including Travellers

124. Provision to meet the needs of children from ethnic minorities, including the children of Travellers, is satisfactory and provides sound value for money. Over 80 per cent of the 1200 children from ethnic minority groups receive some support through the Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG). There are about 200 children of Travellers in the LEA and about half of them are supported through EMTAG. The LEA has developed a comprehensive evidence base on ethnic minority children, including those who have English as an additional language (EAL), which includes their comparative performance and related information on attendance and the level of exclusions. This data is effectively used to set LEA targets and is used to underpin the development of targets for schools. These procedures are effectively overseen by an AIS/EMTAG working group which makes recommendations for improvement to an associated steering group. However, statistics are not yet routinely provided for schools as part of annual performance data.

Measures taken to combat racism

125. The LEA is making a satisfactory contribution to combating racism. Wakefield Council has adopted the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Equality Standard 2. However, the development of policies to meet recommendations of the Macpherson inquiry report into the death of Stephen Lawrence has been slow. At the time of the inspection the LEA was in process of updating its equal opportunities, race relations and racial harassment policies in the light of the CRE's standards and the Macpherson report. New documentation includes comprehensive guidance on all aspects of race relations and racial harassment, and will significantly strengthen existing guidance and monitoring procedures. Co-operation between education

services and other departments and agencies is sound. Arrangements for consultation with communities represented on the South Asian liaison group are now sound and improving.

Social exclusion

126. Promoting social inclusion and lifelong learning is a key corporate priority for Wakefield. There are a number of significant strengths in both planning and provision of support and the LEA plays a full and effective part in co-ordinating, managing and implementing measures to combat social exclusion

127. Work in support of children in public care is based upon effective co-operation between social service, education and the health service. It is good and improving. The LEA's approach to the inclusion of pupils with special educational need is equally robust and effective, commanding widespread support from schools, parents and families across the LEA. Partnerships with police, voluntary agencies and the private sector are focused effectively on support for disaffected young people, crime reduction and actions against drug and alcohol abuse. The number of exclusions from schools has been significantly reduced and work with partnerships such as Translink and Youth Train, together with co-operation with Barnardos, helps to provide opportunities for young people to stay in education and move successively to the next stage of work, training or further education.

128. The process is significantly aided by effective local protocols between the LEA and further education establishments, particularly Wakefield College. Lifelong learning provision enhances both individuals' involvement in continuing education and parental and family involvement in children's' learning, for example through EYDCP initiatives and family literacy and numeracy work in schools. The local authority works with a wide variety of local public, private and voluntary sector partners to reduce exclusion and to ensure that there is support for vulnerable members of society.

129. Services maintain and exchange comprehensive information on the LEA's most vulnerable pupils. However, problems in developing fully compatible ICT administrative systems have delayed the development of more efficient electronic transfer of data between schools and the LEA, and between education services and other departments. Nevertheless, despite this, strengths substantially outweigh weaknesses and overall provision is good.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision to combat racism:

- the school equality audit should be completed quickly and, in the light of consultation, the LEA's new arrangements introduced as soon as possible.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- the criteria for accessing support for EDP priority activities should be clarified with schools, and the methodology for and costs of allocating that support to individual schools made more transparent;

In order to improve its implementation of Fair Funding and Best Value:

- clearer specifications, and information on the costs of LEA services offered to schools, should be developed; and
- information should be provided to schools on alternative sources of services and support.

In order to develop financial autonomy in schools:

- the task of working with schools to eliminate budget deficits should be completed within set timescales;
- a revised funding formula, yielding clear and accurate information on which schools can base budget decisions, should be agreed with schools and introduced in 2001, with full implementation from 2002; and
- improved financial information should be developed, including information on delegated and additional resources, to help schools to effectively manage their budgets.

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- an integrated and coherent policy statement on monitoring, challenge, support and intervention in schools should be produced;
- there should be greater transparency in the funding of, and entitlement to, advisory visits in order to encourage schools to be more responsible for their own improvement;
- easily accessible and clear information on good practice in schools should be provided and used to develop networks of support between schools, and between schools and the LEA;
- the local authority should consider an amendment of the Best Value Review timetable to enable the present internal review of the Advisory and Inspection Service to become a full Best Value Review; and
- data on the achievement of ethnic minority pupils should be included in the RIS data sent to schools in 2001.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- uncertainties on the future of administrative ICT systems need to be resolved; and
- priority should be given to the development of electronic communication between the LEA and schools, and to ensuring effective transfer of pupil data between schools and between differing services.

In order to improve strategic management:

- the role of the LEA should be defined more clearly, in consultation with schools, setting a clear timescale and staged targets for securing the relationship it will maintain with its schools, and in supporting schools' moves towards greater autonomy; and
- a framework for consultation should be defined and published, setting out clearly the forms of consultation, and the circumstances in which particular forms of consultation will apply.

In order to improve asset management and buildings maintenance:

- the current arrangements for delegation of repairs and maintenance expenditure, and the extent to which pooling of resources should continue, should be reviewed with schools.

In order to improve grounds maintenance:

- service provision and quality should be reviewed in association with schools, and recommendations acted upon.

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:

- systems should be devised for more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the provision for, and progress of, pupils with SEN in mainstream education;
- specific criteria for the role of support services should be developed which clearly differentiate between their responsibilities, and those of schools; and
- quality assurance measures for allocating and monitoring the effectiveness of support services should be strengthened.

in order to improve provision to combat racism:

- the school equality audit should be completed quickly and, in the light of consultation, the LEA's new arrangements introduced as soon as possible.

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**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 0207 421 6800

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**City of Wakefield Metropolitan Borough Council
County Hall
Bond Street
Wakefield
WF1 2QL**

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