

**INSPECTION OF  
SUNDERLAND  
LOCAL EDUCATION  
AUTHORITY**



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**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS  
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## 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. In addition to the standard themes the inspection covered provision for the early years, attendance in secondary schools and the use of City Challenge funding.

2. The inspection was in two stages. An initial review established a picture of the LEA's context, the performance of its schools, its strategy and the management of services. The initial review was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, school inspection and audit reports, LEA documentation, and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was sent to 95 schools. The response rate was 73%.

3. The second stage of the inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 6 secondary schools, 24 primary schools, 2 nursery schools and 2 special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

4. This report draws on material from the initial review, from the school survey and from the school visits, together with evidence relevant to the themes drawn from recent HMI visits to Sunderland schools.

*August 1998*

\* LEA Support for School improvement: A Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities, London. OFSTED. 1997.

## COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Sunderland LEA serves an urban industrial area in the North East of England. Its population is stable both in numbers and social composition. It is largely white, has relatively few households of high social class, and, despite significant recent economic regeneration, suffers from high levels of unemployment, with a particularly serious problem of long-term unemployment. Its population is relatively unhealthy and the area is overall amongst the 10% most deprived districts in the country.

6. The performance of pupils is, at all stages, generally slightly below national figures, but it compares well with that observed in similar authorities. It is also improving at a higher rate than nationally, so that the gap with national figures is closing. The schools in the LEA have much to do, but they deserve considerable credit for what counts as relative success.

7. There are strengths and weaknesses in most aspects of the LEA's contribution to this performance, but the former outweigh the latter. Moreover, the LEA is well-led, and has the capacity for further improvement, given the whole-hearted commitment of elected members. Some schools doubt that commitment - indeed of those that were visited, most did - because the LEA chooses to spend below its SSA. However, a detailed analysis in this report suggests that this view is not entirely fair. Nevertheless, this year's budget-setting process has left some repairs to be made in the relationship between the schools and the LEA, which is traditionally good.

8. The schools are aware of, and applaud, the LEA's emphasis on raising attainment. They are much less clear about how it is setting out to do so. It describes itself as providing 'leadership in partnership', but schools have no precise idea what that means, largely because the LEA has not defined the terms for itself. It has not explicitly set out, by agreement with the schools, the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and LEA with regard to school improvement.

9. Nor has it defined what it means by monitoring, support and intervention, or reflected that distinction in the funding of the inspection and advisory service. None of the funding is delegated, and a substantial proportion of the work of the advisory service is taken up by monitoring visits and reviews which are variable in the extent to which they meet their aim of encouraging school self-evaluation. There is no systematic assessment of the needs of individual schools.

10. The LEA has, therefore, some re-thinking to do, and its professional leadership needs time to do it. It is no help that its senior management team has to report to and service two separate committees of the Council, following a recent amalgamation of the Education and Leisure Departments. Schools value the openness and accessibility of senior officers, but those officers have a workload so heavy that there is a danger of immediate exigencies precluding strategic forethought.

11. The schools visited were all improving in specific aspects of their work, and often overall. The LEA had made some contribution to that improvement in four out of five secondary schools, 10 out of 14 primary schools and both nursery schools visited. That

contribution was less evident in the secondary schools. It was usually apparent that the major factor in school improvement was the quality of the headteachers - but the LEA had given considerable attention to this, and the evidence of the inspection is that it is paying dividends. This contribution to improvement should be set in the context of a high overall level of delegation, with service costs which are well below average.

12. Overall, then, the LEA gives satisfactory value for money, but there are some areas in which improvement is both needed and possible. For example:

provision for excluded pupils is not effective in achieving re-integration into mainstream schools;

support for middle management is less effective than that for headteachers;

despite the high proportion of pupils with statements, not all special educational needs are met;

management services are often effective, but not consistently so; quality assurance procedures in the LEA and across the Council do not in practice ensure service delivery of uniformly high quality;

attendance in some secondary schools is below national figures, and the contribution of the Education Social Work Service (ESWS) to raising it is inconsistent;

a good start has been made, in many ways, on the literacy and numeracy strategies, but support needs to be more carefully targeted, in the light of an analysis of the schools' needs;

the LEA is somewhat behind others in its analysis and use of performance data and in training the schools to use it; as a result, the understanding of target-setting is imperfectly established;

City Challenge in North Sunderland has been an important initiative, the benefits of which might have been greater had the LEA been in a position to manage it, as it now does with Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funded projects, more intensively;

the LEA has managed its provision of school places well but faces a growing number of surplus places in nursery and primary schools, on which it must continue to act, if it is to maintain efficient provision.

13. These are significant issues, which need to be tackled, but they are not major debilitating weaknesses. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory requirements and operates effectively as an organisation. It needs, above all, to redefine its role and re-cast its strategy. It has the personnel, the leadership and the goodwill of schools to do so.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**A. In order to improve its strategic management, the LEA should, in the context of national policy:**

- (i) make strategic management a higher priority in its use of officers' time;
- (ii) define its role and priorities in relation to schools more specifically;
- (iii) devise and consistently operate consultation procedures to reach speedier and more specific decisions;  
make the corporate budget setting process more transparent, involving schools in the process.

**B. In order to improve its contribution to improving attainment, teaching and management in the schools, the LEA should:**

- (i) establish a clear strategy for school improvement, and ensure that the schools understand that strategy;
- (ii) provide support where it is needed, according to a systematic assessment of schools' needs;  
strengthen its support for the schools' middle managers;

**C. In order to improve access to education for all pupils, the LEA should:**

- (i) establish clear procedures, clearly understood by the schools, for the re-integration of excluded pupils into mainstream schools;
- (ii) continue its drive to raise attendance levels, ensuring schools' needs for the support of the ESWs are met;  
ensure that schools' and pupils' needs for educational psychological support are met.

**D. In order to improve its management services for schools, the LEA should:**

- (i) establish effective quality assurance systems, revising its service level agreements with the schools.

**E. In order to maintain efficient provision of schools, the LEA should:**

- (i) seek to reduce the levels of surplus places in nurseries and primary schools.

## **SECTION 1. THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA**

### ***The District***

14. The City of Sunderland is an urban metropolitan area in the North East of England on the estuary of the River Wear. It has had a relatively stable population for twenty years. The current population is 296,000. In recent years the number of households has been increasing. Between 1981 and 1991, the number of single occupant households rose from 22,000 to 30,000. This figure is expected to rise. In 1981, 6.6% of households with dependent children were headed by a lone parent. In 1991, this figure had risen to 17%.

15. Over the last twenty years there have been large-scale changes in the local economy. The shipbuilding and coal-mining industries which formed its base have declined sharply. At the same time there has been a notable increase in service jobs and the city has also become a major motor manufacturing centre. Nonetheless, unemployment is high, at 14% in 1996, compared with 9% nationally. There is a particular problem with long term unemployment. In 1996, almost 40% of unemployed benefit claimants had been unemployed for over 12 months.

16. Sunderland is amongst the most deprived 10% of all districts in the country. According to 1991 census data, fewer of Sunderland's population have higher educational qualifications and are in higher social and economic classes than nationally or in similar areas. The proportion of pupils in its schools eligible for free school meals is also higher than the national proportion but close to the proportion in similar areas. The population has significantly more health problems than nationally. A third of Sunderland's households contain at least one person with a limiting long-term illness, compared to a quarter nationally.

### ***Pupils and schools***

17. The school age population is currently 50,677. A higher proportion (3.1%) of the city's pupils in primary schools have statements of special educational need than the national level (2.6%). In secondary schools, that proportion is much closer to other areas: 4.2% compared with 3.9%. At 1.5%, the proportion of pupils of minority ethnic origin, is substantially lower than nationally or in similar authorities.

18. Of the school population, 3,376 pupils are in nursery schools or classes. There are 11 nursery schools in the city, and 51 of the primary schools have nursery classes attached to them. It is the Council's policy to provide a nursery place for all three and four year olds whose parents want one and in 1995, 82% of Sunderland's three and four year olds were in maintained nursery provision, compared with 58% nationally. There are 97 primary schools, providing for 27,073 pupils between the ages of 4 and 11. Twenty-one of these schools are voluntarily aided. The LEA forecasts that the number of pupils in this age group will decline to 26,210 by the school year 2000/01.

19. There are 17 secondary schools, providing for 19,360 pupils, a number which the LEA forecasts will rise to 20,111 by 2002/03, after which it will begin to decline. Three of the secondary schools are voluntary aided and provide for pupils from 11 to 18. The other secondary schools provide for pupils from 11 to 16. Their pupils attend the City of Sunderland College for post-16 education. In 1997, 51.9% of Sunderland's 16 year olds remained in full-time education. Approximately two per cent of Sunderland's pupils are in independent schools, a lower proportion than nationally.

20. The LEA maintains 8 special schools and has resourced units or curriculum access provision for special educational needs in 12 schools. Of primary aged pupils, 1.6% are in special schools, compared with 1.1% nationally; of secondary age pupils, 2.2% compared with 1.6% nationally. The LEA has a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and provides education for young people in social services establishments.

### **Resources**

21. The LEA's net expenditure on education is less than the standard spending assessment (SSA). This has been a highly contentious matter among the schools. In the financial year 1997-98 the City of Sunderland was one of 11 metropolitan LEAs in England to spend less than the full SSA on education. In 1997-98, the percentage of SSA spent on education was fourth lowest of all English metropolitan LEAs and below the national average (103.6%), the metropolitan average (102.3%) and that of Sunderland's statistical neighbours (104.2%).

### **22. Recent net expenditure on education in relation to SSA is shown below.**

Financial year	SSA for education £m	Net expenditure on education £m	Expenditure as a % of SSA
1995/96	110.9	110.3	99.5
1996/97	114.9	113.5	98.8
1997/98	113.7	109.0	95.8
1998/99	123.9	118.8	95.9

*Source~ City of Sunderland City Treasurer*

23. Central government's SSA is divided into five blocks. Recent trends in the variance between the Council's total expenditure in each of the five SSA service blocks are shown below. The figures for budgeted expenditure on education do not include the Council's expenditure on Social Services day nursery provision, although in some local authorities this expenditure does appear under the education budget heading. This amounts to approximately £1m per annum and is currently shown as part of the Council's expenditure against the Personal Social Services SSA block

SSA service block	<b>Variance of budgeted expenditure versus final SSA allocation</b>				
	1994-95 £M	1995-96 £M	1996-97 £M	1997-98 £M	1998-99 £M
Education	-1.0	-0.6	-1.4	-4.7	-5.1
Personal Social services	1.1	1.2	3.5	2.3	2.4
Highways	-1.4	-0.1	-1.5	-1.2	-1.3
Maintenance					
Other services	2.1	5.2	5.8	11.9	10.5
Capital financing	-0.8	-1.6	-0.6	-0.5	3.6
<b>Total variance</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>10.1</b>

Source City of Sunderland City Treasurer

24. Since 1996-97 there has been an increasing gap between SSA allocation and total expenditure on education. However, the Council has been faced by an increasing SSA allocation for education, but reductions in other SSA blocks. The Council has also had to manage its overall finances within a relatively static overall spending cap whilst seeking to maintain expenditure commitments. In 1998-99 these commitments will include significant financial priority areas such as:

- the Strategic Initiatives Budget, (about £3 m);
- revenue contribution to capital expenditure (about £2 m);
- leisure centre subsidies (about £4 m);
- additional contribution to the superannuation fund (about £2 m)

25. Maintaining these and other initiatives within the spending cap has placed a strain on the Council's overall finances and its major services. The Council has therefore found it necessary to obtain reductions in budget bids from all its major services. As shown in the following table, the education budget has not been subject to such severe reductions as other service areas.

**Trends in budget reductions 1994-95 to 1998-99  
shown as percentage reduction against original budget bid**

Service Area	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Management	11.0	5.5	7.5	5.0	5.0
Housing (General Fund)	No Reduction	5.5	7.5	5.0	5.0
Social Services	3.9	5.5	2.2	5.0	3.2
Environment	12.8	5.5	7.5	5.0	5.0
Leisure		8.4	5.5	7.5	5.0
Public Health	9.3	4.7	7.5	5.0	5.0
<b>Education</b>	2.0	5.1	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>Increase</b>

*Source City of Sunderland City Treasurer*

26. The issue of funding is further complicated by the city's Strategic Initiatives Budget. The budget is made up from funds that are drawn pro-rata from all areas of the Council's

activity. The percentages of these that have been used to finance specific education projects is shown below.

**Strategic initiatives budget spent on  
education projects**

Financial year	£000s	% of total fund
1995-96	1280	33.5
1996-97	790	25.6
1997-98	677	23.4

*Source City of Sunderland, City Treasurer*

27. The City of Sunderland has also obtained additional grants that have been used to fund revenue and capital expenditure on specific education projects. The component of these that

has been used for education initiatives is shown below.

Financial year	City Challenge		Single Regeneration Budget	
	£000s	% of total fund	£000s	% of total fund
1995-96	1672	24.1	50	2.7
1996-97	874	16.3	70	2.9
1997-98	1113	20.7	461	20.9

Source: *City of Sunderland, City Treasurer*

28. Sunderland has the highest level of delegation to schools of all metropolitan LEAs. CIPFA's figures from 1997-98 for the percentage of expenditure spent outside of schools show Sunderland's percentage to be 16.7 compared with a median of 26% and a maximum of 33%.

29. Budget restrictions and preservation of the Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) have meant that LEA expenditure in areas of mandatory and discretionary exceptions has been cut in order to protect schools' budgets.

30. Sunderland's net expenditure per pupil in LEA schools in 1997-98 (source: CIPFA) was £2344. This compares with an average, in all metropolitan authorities, of £2429, within a range from £2813 to £2156.

31. It seems clear that the Council has sought to protect the education budget. Nevertheless, schools are concerned that the LEA spends below SSA. The school survey found education funding to be the area where headteachers were least satisfied. All headteachers interviewed raised it as a matter of concern. Senior LEA officers acknowledge that expenditure compared with SSA has been an increasing problem in relations with schools.

### ***The Council, the Education Committee and the Education Department***

32. A combined Department of Education and Community Services reports to the Council's Leisure and Education Committees, which remain separate. The dual committee structure places a heavy work load on officers, particularly those whose responsibilities covers the areas of responsibility of both the leisure and education committees. It leads to an inefficient use of officers' time and militates against the benefits of integrating the two departments.

33. The Education Committee has one principal sub-committee which meets monthly to review and monitor schools' performance. It has seven sub-groups or panels which meet as necessary to deal with specific matters such as exclusions, school attendance and senior departmental appointments.

34. The Director of Education and Community Services heads a strategic management team of six officers. Four of these officers are designated Assistant Directors and are responsible, respectively for: community services, comprising community development, youth, arts, libraries, the school library service, family literacy and the National Grid for Learning; for support services, comprising operational services, educational psychology, educational social work, learning support and direct services; for recreational and contract services; and for curriculum and quality assurance. The span of responsibilities for the support services is a wide one, linking management support with pupil services. Two additional members make up the full complement. The fifth member of this strategic team heads the policy and research team charged with the co-ordination of policy with services to members, with forward planning, with research and with governor development. The sixth member, head of operations, manages all matters relating to finance and personnel.

35. All of the Assistant Directors carry some educational responsibilities but the bulk of the work with schools rests with two of them, together with the head of research and policy. Audit Commission figures show that the LEA spends only half the amount per pupil spent by other LEAs on strategic management. The level of resource devoted to strategic management is low.

36. The construction of a unified department from its two component parts of the unified department has been a major and time-consuming management priority since the amalgamation. The amalgamation has enabled schools to have access to specialist services now located in the combined department. Specialist officers working in recreation advise schools on the development of their leisure facilities for joint educational and community use. Officers who manage the school meals contract have advised schools on the development of education in nutrition. Sports development officers provide both a direct coaching service for schools to use with their pupils and training to develop teachers' skills as coaches. The library service, through homework clubs and study centres in community libraries and through its contribution to the National Year of Reading, also provides direct services to schools.

## SECTION 2: THE PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOLS

37. Details of the educational performance of Sunderland's schools are in Appendix 2. The data used in this section are illustrative, not comprehensive.

38. The attainment of pupils on entry to the city's nursery and reception classes inspected by OFSTED is low but pupils under-five make good progress.

39. Attainment at all stages of compulsory education remains a little below national averages. For example, in 1997:

at the end of Key Stage 1, results at Level 2 or above in English are lower at 77.9% than those nationally which are 80.4%. Results in mathematics and science are higher than the national results;

at the end of Key Stage 2, attainment in English continues lower than nationally at Level 4 or above at 60%, compared with 63.2%. It is above the national figures in mathematics 63.6% (nationally 62%) and science 71% (nationally 68.8%);

at the end of Key Stage 3, English results are lower than nationally. In Sunderland, 51% achieve Level 5 or above, compared with 56.6% across the country as a whole. Results in mathematics and science are also lower than the national figures;

GCSE results are below national averages for higher grade passes. In 1997, 93.7% of Sunderland's pupils gained at least one A-G pass, compared with 94.0% nationally but only 35.2% gained five A\*~C grades compared with the national figure of 43.3%;

there are considerable variations between the City's schools. In one, fewer than 10% of pupils achieved five or more passes at GCSE at grade A\*~C and in another secondary school fewer than 20%. But, in five secondary schools the percentage gaining such passes exceeded the national average;

at all ages, girls generally perform better than boys, particularly at the higher levels, but there is considerable variation in the relative attainment of boys and girls in different schools.

40. Primary schools are improving at rates similar to those nationally in English and science and faster than nationally in mathematics. In most secondary schools improvement in GCSE is faster than the national rate of change. For example:

in reading, at the age of 7, the percentage of pupils gaining Level 2 rose by 1.4% points between 1995 and 1997 compared with 1.6 % nationally;

in English, at the age of 11, National Curriculum test results at Level 4 rose by 13.9% percentage points between 1995 and 1997 compared with 14.7% nationally;

in science, at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, the rates of change also mirror the national rates;

the rate of change is rather better in mathematics. At the age of 7, the percentage gaining Level 2 increased by 3.6% between 1995 and 1997, compared with a decline of 0.6 %

nationally. At the age of 11, at Level 4, Sunderland's results rose by 20.3 % compared with 17.1% nationally;

between 1994 and 1997, the proportion of Sunderland's pupils gaining five A\*~C grades rose by 4.8 points, compared with 2.6 nationally;

in 12 of the 17 secondary schools the change in the percentage of pupils achieving five A\*~ C grades between 1994-97 is greater than that nationally and in three schools the change exceeds 10%. However, there has been no significant improvement in the one school where the percentage of pupils gaining five subjects at grades A\*~C is below 10%.

**41. OFSTED's inspection data shows 73% of Sunderland's primary schools are good or very good, compared with 68% nationally; 44% of the city's secondary schools are good or better compared with 68% nationally.** For example:

in primary schools, the quality of education provided is good in 74% of schools, the same proportion as the national one. Management is strong in 79% of schools, compared with 64% nationally;

in secondary schools, it is only in respect of management and efficiency that Sunderland's schools perform better than schools across the country as a whole: 88% are good or very good. The weaknesses in Sunderland's secondary schools are in procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance, parental involvement in children's learning; the match of number, qualifications and experience of support staff to the demands of the curriculum, adequacy of accommodation, the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and planning for progression and continuity, particularly at Key Stage 3;

the **quality of the teaching** in the lessons observed, over 5,000 in primary and 3,500 in secondary schools between 1994 and 1996, was better than that provided in the country as a whole. There were particular strengths in the teaching of the under-fives. In secondary schools, teaching was better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3; expectations of pupils are higher in Key Stage 4;

**attendance** is similar to national averages in primary schools but in secondary schools attendance rates are slightly lower than national levels at 89.7% compared with 90.9%;

**behaviour** in primary schools is better than that seen nationally. It is good in 86% of primary schools and mostly good in secondary schools.

## SECTION 3:

## LEA STRATEGY

42. The LEA's officers are committed to openness and readiness for debate with schools and the schools share with them a commitment to raising standards. The respective roles of the schools and the LEA are, however, not clearly defined and the LEA's overall strategy for school improvement lacks clarity.

### Role and priorities

43. The City Council sets out its overall strategy in 'Sunderland City Strategy 1997-2000'. The strategic objectives in the document are not specific to particular services and do not refer to schools. However, in addition to them the City Council places special emphasis on 'Social Inclusion', 'Educational Attainment' and 'Young People'.

44. In the City strategy document for 1997-1 998, the separate Education and Leisure Committees set out their common strategy. The Education Committee defines its role as the exercise of leadership in partnership with the community by:

- promoting the highest level of attainment for all;
- planning for institutional and service development;
- resourcing institutions;
- providing information about educational facilities and opportunities;
- advocating on behalf of the service and individuals;
- monitoring and evaluating education standards and provision.

45. Within this role, the corporate priorities for both the education and leisure services committees are set out. These are to promote higher achievement; to ensure participation by and inclusion of the people of Sunderland in service development and provision; to build upon the established principles of partnership and to develop effective open channels of communication; and to develop and enhance the quality and efficiency of the service.

46. The higher level priorities are developed into proposals for action in the group development plans produced in the context of the department's overall strategy and priorities by the Assistant Directors. These development plans show what is to be done, by whom and by what deadline. They also provide indicators of success but these are expressed as the completion of tasks rather than as quantifiable changes, for example in pupils' performance. This will change, as LEA-wide targets are set.

47. The hierarchy of plans is clear but the way in which the levels of planning relate to each other is not. The plans do not show exactly how each level delivers the higher strategies and objectives. Nor do they show how the work of each of the sections relates to that of the others. The process is weak in specifics and detail.

48. In setting out its strategy, the LEA does not define its preferred working relationship with its schools. The phrase 'leadership in partnership' expresses an aspiration but the LEA has not set out in detail what it means. The role of the LEA was not understood well in the schools visited. The education department's officers, and particularly advisers,

expect to give an educational direction - the LEA's responses to recent developments in the teaching of literacy and numeracy are instances in which they have done so effectively - and to take the schools with them. The LEA initiates development and the schools are encouraged to contribute at an early stage. The schools respond to these initiatives as well as taking initiative for themselves, on occasions, but the respective roles and obligations of the two sides of the partnership are not explicitly set out. In particular the schools, both those achieving relatively well and some where attainment is low, are not sufficiently challenged to strive for continuous improvement in all aspects of their work.

### ***Strategy for school improvement***

49. The specific proposals for action are mainly the responsibility of the department's Curriculum and Quality Assurance group. The proposals have evolved and are subject to review and modification in the light of national priorities. This evolutionary process has led to an increasing agenda for change, currently running to 19 items. They are as follows:

- establishing a culture of educational improvement in the city;
- seeking external funding to support raising achievement;
- targeting those schools in the greatest need;
- developing common systems of assessment which aid progression;
- establishing management information systems for use by schools and by LEA officers;
- developing LEA curriculum policies;
- identifying areas for concern and directing resources towards them;
- monitoring resources to ensure these are best used to improve educational achievement;
- setting and supporting targets which link LEA targets to those of schools and national expectations;
- promoting home-school agreements and other parent-school partnerships;
- establishing extra-curricular opportunities;
- promoting family learning;
- developing experiences for pupils which ensure all skills and talents are developed;
- developing effective governing bodies which can support their schools in a range of new responsibilities;
- linking school development planning to the Education Development Plan (EDP) and city-wide strategic planning;
- managing underachievement, disaffection and truancy;
- establishing new strategies for intervention;
- establishing codes of practice which offer best value to schools in local authority services;
- mobilising the resources of the whole department to support the raising of achievement.

50. The individual items are desirable in themselves, but there is some overlap between them and it is not clear what relative priority is attached to them. Moreover, they are simply too numerous. Members have confirmed their support for them and

commissioned a full achievement strategy to analyse these objectives into activities and timescales. Work on prioritising these objectives has begun as part of the construction of the LEA's EDP, in order to focus on a smaller number of core activities and so act more purposefully to improve schools and, in particular, to raise achievement.

51. The service group with the most direct role in supporting school improvement is the centrally funded Quality Assurance and School Development Group. The strategy of the group is to improve schools through a combination of day-to-day support on such matters as appointments, management, action/development planning, curriculum and target setting, through in-service training provision for teachers and through whole-school and subject reviews. These reviews result in written reports which are presented to the schools and their governors. The forms taken by the reviews are varied and the reviews vary also in the effectiveness of their contribution to school improvement. An important aim of the review process is to help schools to develop self-evaluation skills, using external performance indicators and benchmarks, as well as internal indicators and success criteria. This aim is not fully met (see Section 5, below). As well as this work, the department increasingly analyses a range of performance data and presents this to schools in a format which will encourage target-setting and improve performance. However, this is at a very early stage of development and little work has been undertaken so far to help primary headteachers in particular to use and to interpret the information sent to them by the LEA. The results of this data analysis, alongside OFSTED reports, National Curriculum and examination results are presented to the Review and Monitoring Sub-Committee.

52. Through this work, the LEA is aware of the under-performance of boys and the dip in standards at Key Stage 3 and, although the latter has not been targeted discretely, attempts have been made to improve the situation through enhanced primary/secondary transfer arrangements and through tracking more able pupils through Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. National initiatives, such as the literacy project, are also aimed at raising achievement.

53. In addition to this internally funded work, the City Council has been very successful in gaining central government funding to support its regeneration initiatives over the last five years. This work has a much wider impact than on education alone, but bears upon school improvement in various ways. Recent bids for funding have been more specific about educational aspects than were the early ones.

54. Throughout the regeneration process, the Council has been committed to long-term work in improving educational performance, by augmenting its provision for under-fives. It has used its Strategic Initiatives Budget to extend the scope of nursery provision, and drawn on this fund and on City Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget money to enrich young children's experience with projects such as Bookstart and 'Talk, Talk'. It has also used these funds to undertake other work on broadening the community facilities offered by a nursery, supporting family literacy and numeracy, strengthening anti-bullying work and introducing vocational work at Key Stage 4, all in areas of social and economic need.

### ***The school's response to the LEA's strategy***

55. The schools visited understood the LEA's emphasis on attainment. To promote high attainment is a priority for them as well as for the LEA. Other than that, their understanding of the LEA's strategy, like their understanding of the mutual roles of themselves and the LEA, is less clear. They tend to see the LEA's priorities in terms of the particular services they use.

This is not to say that the schools respond negatively to LEA initiatives. The schools visited make generally productive use of the services available to them and their response to specific initiatives, for example the developing literacy strategy, is good.

### ***Consultation***

56. The LEA formally established a new consultative process, approved by Committee, in January 1997. There are forums for consultation at several levels, including locality forums which are based on the four divisions of the city and a network of headteachers and representatives from the Sunderland Governors' Association. Other opportunities for consultation are provided by the briefing papers supplied for the agenda of termly governing body meetings. Some of these now elicit a written response. Also, there are ad hoc consultative procedures to deal with particular matters as they crop up. Currently, the department is consulting with the schools on provision for special needs, on the provision of school places in Washington and on the future of the LMS scheme.

57. The effectiveness of these procedures and of the schools' responses to them is varied. The openness of the LEA's senior officers is widely praised in the schools but, at the levels of strategy and policy formation, more of the schools visited felt informed after decisions had been made, than felt genuinely consulted during the decision-making process. The budget-setting process for the current financial year has been particularly contentious and many, particularly primary, schools would have wished that the budget had set different priorities. Other problems arise from the timing of consultations. The current consultation on special educational needs, for example, was felt by several schools to have taken far too long and by some to be unconvincing because they felt, wrongly, that the fundamental decisions had been made in advance of the consultation.

### ***The LEA's evaluation of its effectiveness***

58. The LEA evaluates its effectiveness in several ways. These include monitoring its progress in the implementation of its action plan and surveying the views of consumers of its services, teachers, governors and its own staff. The main evaluative procedure of the Council is its system of performance management. Through it the Director of Education and Community Services is accountable to the Chief Executive for meeting the annual targets for action set by the department in the context of the City Strategy. Within the department itself, the work of the function groups, under the direction of the Assistant Directors, is assessed through a twice six-monthly review of the progress being made toward meeting the objectives they have set themselves.

59. In February 1998, the results of the various evaluations were gathered together into an overall review of the Education and Community Services Department, conducted

under the direction of the Chief Executive's department. The findings of this review incorporate recommendations for future action which include improving the process of evaluation of the department by establishing a set of performance indicators against which the LEA's success in improving its schools and raising the attainment of its pupils may be measured. Currently, evaluation makes only limited use of such quantitative methods, concentrating instead on reviewing the completion of planned tasks and on the views of the services taken by their stakeholders.

60. Evaluation of the performance of the education service is conducted by the Education Committee's Review and Monitoring Sub-committee. It monitors the findings of OFSTED

inspections, the progress of schools toward meeting the requirements for action set out in those reports and the aggregated performance of the LEA's schools. Additionally, schools are encouraged to undertake their own programmes of self-evaluation and a long-term evaluation of the LEA's early years provision is being conducted by a higher education institution. None of these evaluative procedures uses any consistent system to assess the value for money provided by the services.

## **FUNDING**

61. The LMS scheme was last revised in the financial year 1994-95. The LEA is presently considering whether the formula through which resources are allocated should be altered and a working group, comprising officers and school representatives, is charged with this responsibility and is scheduled to report so that any changes can be included in the 1999-2000 budget cycle.

62. The Council's medium-term financial plan sets out a three-year financial strategy, outlining the resources required to meet, for example, policy commitments or legislative requirements. However, it is not clear on what analysis of need the allocation of core funding is made.

63. The LEA holds discussions about the budget with existing groups such as headteacher groupings, the Governors Association and Locality Forums. The Deputy City Treasurer participates in these discussions. The meetings are well attended by headteachers but, in the matter of budget-setting, there are considerable tensions between the City Council and the schools, which see themselves as informed of decisions rather than involved in their making. A survey of 71 headteachers, carried out by the LEA, revealed that 46% of respondents considered that they were rarely or never consulted in the budget setting process. The school survey conducted as part of this inspection confirmed these views. There were high levels of dissatisfaction with the involvement of schools in the budget-setting process.

64. The LEA provides adequate financial information for schools. Nevertheless, interview evidence and the findings of the LEA's survey indicate that timeliness of information is an issue for the schools. In 1997-98 there was a reported delay of three to four weeks between a school's commitment of expenditure and it being recorded on the central general ledger system. The Council has recently addressed this issue and the delay is now reported to have been reduced to two weeks. Overall, the financial management services provided by the LEA are favourably regarded by schools.

65. The LEA also monitors school expenditure effectively against straight line forecasts and investigates the causes of any significant variations. The current arrangements for monitoring schools' budgets has ensured that only two schools have developed a budget deficit of more than three per cent. The City Treasurer reports that the last significant overspend in any part of the Education Budget was in 1991-92.

## **SCHOOL PLACES AND ADMISSIONS**

66. In January 1997, the LEA had 11.57% surplus places in its nursery schools, 12.62% surplus places in its nursery classes, 12.14% surplus places in primary schools and 11.08% surplus places in secondary school. There are signs that the rise in school population that has characterised most of the area for the last decade is coming to a halt and the decrease in roll in Washington continues. Pupil numbers in the primary phase are forecast to fall by 1 % per annum over the next three years and to rise by 0.5% per annum in the secondary phase over the next six years. There are no schools in the primary phase with fewer than 90 pupils, nor in the secondary phase with fewer than 800 pupils.

67. The supply and demand for places in the LEA has been reviewed annually by the Education Committee over the last two years on an area basis. A number of areas are then identified for review by review teams. Formal and informal consultation about the planning process takes place with relevant groups and is reported to Education Committee.

68. In the last year, following its annual review of school places, the LEA conducted a number of area reviews. The proposals resulting from these may be modest, such as changes in standard number; or significant, such as the review of primary school provision in the Hetton area. Other reviews may be prompted by circumstances particular to individual schools. These reviews have rarely led to school closure since the major programme of reduction in secondary provision in the 1980s.

69. A major review is currently in train in Washington. The secondary places review has been well received by the schools. That of primary places in the area has only just begun and, pending its conclusions, some schools have to confront problems consequent on the falling roll in the area.

70. A review of nursery schools and classes across the city has now begun to deal with surplus places in that phase and a wider review of primary school places will soon become necessary.

71. The LEA's Standing Admissions Review Group meets termly. It is made up of officers and representative headteachers. This year, its main focus will be to consider the implications of the Rotherham judgement'. This judgement applies to admissions systems similar to Sunderland's and the LEA will need to completely overhaul its admissions system in all phases in order to meet its statutory responsibilities.

72. Historically, Sunderland has a very low level of admissions appeals each year. In 1996, the rate of appeals was 1.8% for primary schools and 2.5% for secondary schools.

Previous years have usually been below 2%. There is, however, an indication of a rise in the number of appeals for September 1998 admissions, particularly in the centre of the city. As the number of surplus places in schools reduces, parents are less likely to be able to obtain their first choice school and the revised admissions policy will take effect.

73. Twice-yearly structured meetings are held with the two dioceses to discuss the supply of school places, to plan the use of improvement funds and to plan for the removal of surplus places.

74. Exclusions are monitored by the ESWS. All permanent exclusions are referred to the Suspensions Sub-committee which meets weekly to consider whether pupils should be reinstated to schools. Schools, pupils and their families and representatives of the Education Psychological Service (EPS) and ESWS discuss each case and the subcommittee decides whether the pupil should be reinstated. In most cases considered by the sub-committee exclusions are upheld.

75. Excluded pupils attend the PRU on a part-time basis. The number of excluded pupils has increased. Permanent exclusion increased from 1 in 1990-91 to 72 in 1996. Latest figures show that the numbers are now falling. In 1997, they were down to 60. Fixed term exclusions have risen from 385 in 1990-91 to 977 in 1996. There are no formal and agreed procedures with schools for reintegration. Few excluded pupils are reintegrated into mainstream schools. Sometimes pupils attend this part-time and contingency provision in PRUs for too long and with little hope of a full-time placement.

76. The LEA is actively pursuing a policy to improve attendance. A staged response to irregular attendance is currently being implemented on a trial basis in secondary schools. This involves the school's staff and the appropriate education social worker, the school's governing body, the LEA and elected members. Results from the LEA's monitoring of the trial show a consistent improvement in overall attendance and only two schools have fallen back. This work is reported in Section 5, below.

## **THE LEA'S STRATEGY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

77. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs provision has been the subject of a lengthy review in order to deal with these issues:

- the rise in the number of statemented pupils;
- the relatively high proportion of pupils in Sunderland statemented to attend special schools;
- the need for a wider choice of provision, including mainstream special needs provision;
- the promotion of inclusive education for pupils with special educational needs;
- the need to offer better and more appropriate special school accommodation;
- the need to improve the reintegration of excluded pupils.

78. The review has led to the distillation of the principles which now form the special education needs policy, which has been subject to consultation and accepted by the Education Committee.

79. The early stages of the implementation of the policy were weak because they left much uncertainty to be resolved. More specific proposals have now been reported to the education committee.

## **LIAISON WITH OTHER SERVICES AND AGENCIES**

80. Liaison with the Social Services Department (SSD) has improved in recent years. The Children's Services Plan has been devised as the result of the required interdepartmental process. There are regular meetings at director and senior management level, close collaboration in early years provision, close working together on child protection issues, and substantial SSD involvement in the special educational needs review. At member level a joint sub-committee for services for the under-eights includes representation from both education and social services committees, and is serviced jointly by both Directors and their representatives.

81. Liaison with the **Health Authority** is satisfactory. It is conducted through the chief officers' multi-agency group. The LEA has been involved with the Health Action Zone. The Health Authority and provider trusts participated in the LEA's special educational needs review.

82. The local **Training and Enterprise Council** and the LEA share a desire to place the raising of local aspirations at the heart of the regeneration process. They have jointly set up a Strategic Forum for Education and Training Targets. Recent work by the TEC in collaboration with the LEA includes the development of education/business links:  
providing teacher placements in industry, extending work experience for pupils, and promoting curriculum projects relating to the world of work. Additionally, the TEC and the LEA co-operate in steering a number of externally funded local projects.

83. The LEA works very closely with the **Roman Catholic and Anglican Dioceses** in its support for schools in the aided sector which includes three Roman Catholic 11-18 secondary schools. The Diocesan Directors report good liaison with the advisers in terms of identifying schools causing concern at an early stage and also over senior staff appointments.

## **STATUTORY DUTIES**

84. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities. However, the headteacher appraisal system fell into abeyance soon after the first appraisal cycle. Several headteachers have not been appraised within the past four to six years or since their appointment, if that has been more recent. Similarly, teacher appraisal in individual schools has often developed away from the original LEA scheme and is not monitored closely by the LEA.

85. The LEA takes steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of special needs but there are difficulties in a minority of schools. The main problem is where the limited time allocated by the EPS stalls the processes for requesting formal assessment and results in some children who may qualify for statementing having to wait.

86. The LEA has examined the implications for admission procedures of the recent legal judgement and has planned the necessary changes to the admissions system to ensure that it meets legal requirements.

#### **SECTION 4: THE MANAGEMENT OF LEA SERVICES**

87. There are competing pressures on the LEA's services as they seek to introduce new initiatives at the same time as responding to the schools' historic expectations of them. The resolution of these tensions requires a new definition of the mutual roles of LEA and schools and the clear communication of that definition to the schools. It also requires more precise assessment of schools' needs and sharper evaluation of their effectiveness.

88. Schools respond well to the initiatives of the advisory service but they need better analysis of their needs and better access to the provision to meet them. The other services to promote access and achievement do valuable work in the schools but not all of the schools' needs are met. Most management services are valued by the schools and also do valuable work but their deployment is in reaction to demand, rather than based on the assessment of need.

89. The school survey revealed the views of headteachers on the services. The detail of their responses is in Appendix 3. The survey was issued to 95 schools, 69 of whom responded. The headteachers see the LEA as particularly effective in the majority of its management support services.

90. They have a poorer opinion of the LEA in terms of its consultation with them; its help in use of comparative data for target setting; some aspects of support for pupils with special educational needs - particularly the education psychology service, the administration of statements and services for excluded pupils; and its support for schools before, during and after OFSTED inspection. Discussion with schools showed the concern over statementing related to delays at stage three of the Code of Practice, rather than with the administration of the statements themselves.

91. The survey was conducted during the budget-setting period when controversial decisions were being taken. Nevertheless, the results raise fundamental issues for the LEA. In many key areas there are serious gaps between schools' expectations of LEA performance and what they consider the LEA actually achieves. The two need to be brought more closely together.

#### **INSPECTION, ADVICE AND CURRICULUM SUPPORT**

92. **The Quality Assurance and School Development Group** is expanding in order to improve the level of support it provides. Its current establishment comprises the Assistant Director, two staff inspectors (responsible for primary and secondary phases), two primary advisers (with a third to start in September), one special needs adviser, subject advisers for English and drama, mathematics, technology, humanities and music with a modern foreign languages adviser due to start in September; and consultancy available for art and physical education. Science is currently filled on a seconded basis, there having been great difficulty in recruitment. The service also uses sports and arts personnel from the community services section of the combined department. The science vacancy is currently filled on a seconded basis.

93. There is a phase inspector/adviser ratio of 3:97 primary schools and 2:17 secondary.

Additionally, five subject advisers work across the phases. The Key Stage 1 staff inspector has an assignment of 40 schools including 11 nursery schools; the two primary advisers have 34 schools each. These ratios somewhat limit the frequency and length of contacts with schools, particularly primary schools and many of the schools visited, secondary as well as primary, reported unmet needs for advisory support both at management and subject levels. In the absence of delegated funding, there is no clear mechanism for bringing schools' perceived needs and the level of support they receive together.

94. Sunderland spends less than other LEAs on this service. An Audit Commission survey of 21 LEAs in England and Wales shows an average net cost per pupil of £61.07. By comparison, Sunderland spends £40.22. Within these global figures, the variance is greatest for expenditure on advisory teaching and curriculum support on which Sunderland spends £14.38 compared with an average of £37.30.

95. The effectiveness of the advisory and curriculum service is monitored by the Assistant Director mainly through general oversight of the work of the team individual advisers' work plans and the subject and primary phase plans, all of which identify success criteria and performance indicators linked to objectives and targets. The views of schools and the take-up of provision are also used as indicators. Much written evidence is also available from school visit recording forms and subject and school review reports. The weakness of this work is that it does not make systematic links between the work and pupils' attainment; nor is there an effective mechanism for judging the value for money of particular services and activities which are rarely costed.

96. The key function of the advisory service is monitoring and evaluation of school performance. This is reflected in deployment of advisory time. Monitoring takes the form of day visits and the subject and school reviews. Aside from these formal reviews, most of the schools want more support from advisers than is currently always available. This raises a key issue. The LEA has not made a clear distinction between monitoring, intervention which should be in inverse proportion to success, and support which should, be largely at the school's discretion. This will require the LEA to undertake a reassessment of its role.

97. Each inspector and adviser also carries out a wide range of functions related to **support for LEA policy** including: giving advice on appointments to governors and advice to the LEA on the provision of school places and resourcing, accommodation and safety. There is a clear focus for the advisory service through its monitoring programme which is often linked to self-supported review and in-service training, on **promoting school self-review and self-evaluation. This has been pursued through management** courses and written guidance. Historically, most self-improvement initiatives have been in the secondary sector.

98. Support for schools in **preparation for OFSTED inspections** is not given undue prominence. All schools in line to be inspected are offered general training for staff and governors, usually through courses. Individual advisers also, typically spend a day in the school, scrutinising documentation and visiting classrooms. A seconded headteacher is

preparing an LEA evaluation of the **action plans produced after inspections**. The work shows that primary schools would welcome more support with their action plans, although this is currently offered as an entitlement to schools. The LEA provides the support on request but is more pro-active in schools which have had critical reports. The survey shows these services to be well regarded by schools but, in the schools visited, the LEA's support in preparation for inspection has been considerably more effective than its support afterwards.

99. The policy for **supporting schools requiring special measures and schools with serious weaknesses** is to maximise the deployment of help according to the identified need. The LEA has had three primary schools in special measures, one of which has just come out of that category. Another of the special measures schools is subject to a closure proposal. Unsatisfactory OFSTED reports trigger immediate advisory input, initially undertaken by staff inspectors in the drawing up of post-inspection action plans; this is followed by primary and secondary advisory visits connected with the implementation of the plans and the monitoring of progress. The Assistant Director is closely involved. The English and mathematics advisers have also supported special measures primary schools and, by invitation, inspected their subjects in schools with serious weaknesses or where test results are very low.

100. All advisers have a responsibility to improve **teaching and learning**. Priority is given to enhancing teachers' subject knowledge. The LEA has a thorough system of induction for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) requiring schools to provide mentoring and using seconded headteachers to monitor the work as well as providing an in-service training programme using subject advisers. The LEAs support system for NQTs is effective and highly regarded in the schools visited.

101. **In-service training** is provided through the primary and secondary schools in-service training agencies and by the specialist subject advisers. The main secondary schools' in-service training management courses have emphasised school improvement through self-review and, in particular, classroom observation. They have been provided for teachers who are new to, or aspire to, a middle management post and for senior managers, mainly deputies. Follow-up meetings to evaluate the influence of the courses upon practice in schools have been able to demonstrate improvements in pupil mentoring, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, target setting, rewards systems and assertive discipline. The main primary schools' in-service training management courses have changed in focus from curriculum entitlement and planning and school development planning, to self-evaluation. There are also regular courses for subject co-ordinators examining their generic management role.

### ***Performance Data***

102. The analysis of data is, at least from a central point of view, a relatively new task for this LEA. So too are the issue of guidance and advice on its use in schools. The LEA has done less in this regard than some other LEAs, but this reflects a considered position. The LEA does not believe that it should be duplicating the work of the national inspectorial and advisory bodies, or of the DEE, all of whom are providing increasingly detailed data to schools and LEAs. It takes the view that its role is not so much to

generate data, as to collate and disseminate it, mediate it in the light of local needs and conditions and assist schools to interpret it. The LEA has set up a pilot group of 24 schools to consider issues relevant to the use of performance data. The effectiveness of the LEA's work on performance data and target setting is reported in Section 5.

### ***Literacy and numeracy***

103. The LEA's move towards national policies has been made in the context of growing emphasis on basic skills in all phases within the LEA **in recent years, seen** above all in the development of the Standards Fund Programme. For the last three years, the advisory service has seen literacy, numeracy and information technology as particular issues for Sunderland, and has asked headteachers to tailor their programmes accordingly. The effectiveness of the work on literacy and numeracy is reported in Section 5.

### **OTHER SERVICES WHICH IMPROVE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT**

104. Within the Support Services Group, the LEA maintains the following individual services to improve pupils' access and achievement:

- the educational psychology service (EPS);
- the education social work service (ESWS);
- the learning support service (LSS).

105. The services have different methods of analysing needs and deploying staff. LSS provides information to schools on the services it provides and lists of services and their work are included in the newly drafted special educational needs handbook. The EPS is the only service which deploys staff on the basis of criteria using a formula. This formula enables support to be directed at schools with greatest needs. In the other services the formula for allocation of staff is not based on objective criteria, although they are generally informed by a knowledge of the school and its context. Support for statemented pupils is deployed by the head of LSS on the basis of the requirements of the statement. In practice, criteria for the allocation of support to certain categories of need have developed over time and allocations of support are flexible and reflect the circumstances of the school and the extent of support which is already available in the school. Other sections of the LSS deploy support on the basis of referral and, in the case of Alternative Education Section, pupils at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are referred for the consideration of the Behaviour Support Panel. All the services have faced reductions in staff over recent years or in the case of the EPS have faced difficulties with recruitment which have resulted in vacancies and consequent shortages of support in the affected schools.

106. As well as statutory work and contributing to the special educational needs review, the EPS contributes to training, liaison with SSD, working parties, referral panels such as the Behaviour Support Panel and the Formal Statutory Assessment Panel and helps to service the suspensions sub-committee. The service is more successful in its support of special schools than in the mainstream, particularly where the schools do not have dedicated extra provision for special educational needs. The City's level of expenditure

on its EPS is similar to that in other authorities but the schools do not fully understand the basis on which the support is deployed and in many of the primary schools visited the EPS support time available is inadequate particularly for developmental work, for example on improving behaviour compared with the time spent on the fulfilment of statutory responsibilities. The arrangements for deployment of the service are clear on paper but have not been communicated effectively to the schools. Special educational needs assessment was highly regarded in several schools visited but, in others, the process was far too slow.

107. The ESWS service utilises systematic procedures to improve secondary school attendance. This work is separately reported in Section 5 below. The service also makes regular prosecutions for school non-attendance and contributes to the SRB and City Challenge Projects. The service monitors exclusion and is responsible for managing exclusion from the point at which it occurs until an alternative educational placement is made. In the survey the ESWS in the secondary phase is rated more highly than in the primary phase.

108. The work of the LSS service is wide-ranging and is divided into three areas.

- **Support for statemented pupils.** Support is deployed on the basis of the statement but there are no formal criteria to guide the allocation. The special educational needs review recommended that the funding for this support should be devolved to schools and this has been agreed. The schools visited had mixed reactions to the service. Some found their needs, and the needs of the pupils, were met by it but a small number found that the amount of support was inadequate.
- **School and Family Support** which includes curriculum support; traveller education; English for speakers of other languages; visual impairment; hearing impairment; pre-school support and language and communication. The services have professional oversight of units and resourced provision throughout the LEA. They have produced helpful guidance and supporting leaflets for schools and parents.
- **The Alternative Education Branch** includes home and hospital teaching for sick children. It also provides education for pupils who for whatever reason do not attend school in PRUs. The units offer specialist provision for young mothers, anxious and phobic children and for pupils who are likely to return to school as well as pupils who are disaffected and have behaviour problems. These units provide part-time education to excluded pupils but also to pupils who face difficulties which are likely to lead to exclusion.

## **MANAGEMENT SERVICES**

109. The LEA provides a range of management services to schools, of which four were covered in the inspection.

110. Resources for all personnel and finance functions are delegated to schools. Property related services, other than those related to the capital programme or landlord repairs, are similarly delegated. Those schools that choose to purchase these services from the LEA enter into a service level agreement (SLA). Information and computer technology services are also delegated to schools under the terms of an SLA.

111. The quality of management services is variable and the quality assurance procedures are insufficiently effective to ensure consistency. As a result, schools expressed a dissatisfaction with particular services that in some cases coloured their attitude to the LEA as a whole. The cost of the services is generally low, but cannot always be precisely estimated. Therefore the LEA is not in a secure position to assess the value for money provided.

112. LEA staff providing these services face conflicting demands on the use of their time. They acknowledge that they are not able to meet schools' expectations. Headteachers report that the quality of the support service provided by the LEA varies between LEA officers and there are inconsistencies in service delivery.

### ***Personnel services***

113. Personnel services form part of the LEA's Operational Services. The staff not only offer personnel services to schools but also supply personnel support to central education and community services functions of the department. Until March 1998 this offered a wholly integrated personnel service to schools and others. Since then payroll services have been centralised as part of a council initiative.

114. At present all schools have chosen the LEA as their preferred provider of personnel services and entered into SLAs. Gross expenditure for all personnel services in 1997-98 is estimated to be £448,000. Schools are estimated to buy back £355,000 of these services through SLAs.

115. The LEA monitors the level at which services are bought back by schools. There are no other systematic mechanisms to collect the views of schools or other service users.

116. Visits to schools and the school survey show that personnel services are highly valued by headteachers. All but one school reported the service to be more than adequate. Forty-eight of the 69 respondents rated the service as good (29) or very good (19). The quality of services was confirmed throughout the school visits where the service was often described by headteachers as excellent; the speed of response was consistently commended. All schools visited felt that personnel services provided by the LEA offer good value for money and many were complimentary about the helpfulness and attitude of LEA officers with whom they deal.

117. The costs of LEA-provided personnel services are low when compared with other LEAs. The net costs per pupil are £1.99, the second lowest in our sample and compared with a national average of £9.10 per pupil.

## ***Financial Services***

118. Financial services are also part of the LEA's Operational Services. Gross expenditure for the service in 1997-98 was estimated to be £941,000. However, this expenditure supports schools and the Directorate in both the education and community services fields.

119. Financial services are provided by a joint arrangement involving a team from within the department supported by a dedicated group in the City Treasurer's Department. Services provided to schools through this joint arrangement include accountancy, audit, payroll, creditors, cashiers and debtors.

120. This delegated service is bought back by 100% of maintained schools. In 1997-98 it is estimated that this will amount to £530,000. Other than monitoring the rate at which services are bought back, there are no formal means to collect the views of schools or other service users.

121. Visits to schools and the school survey show that financial support services are highly valued by headteachers. Of the 69 schools, 57 rated the service as adequate or better.

122. Most headteachers express the view that LEA officers are informed, helpful and understand the needs of schools. The overall opinion of financial support services is tempered by reported delays in receiving up-to-date information from the Council's central ledger system. Although some headteachers report recent improvements in the timeliness of information, there remain concerns from others that central ledger information is still delayed, often received in batches, and therefore difficult to reconcile with school based records.

123. The costs of LEA-provided financial support services are low when compared with the other 24 LEAs in the Audit Commission sample. The net costs per pupil are £7.97, the second lowest in the study and compared with a national average of £14.75 per pupil.

## ***Information and communication technology***

124. The LEA provides a range of information and communication technology (ICT) services to schools through its Edit service. This includes hardware and software purchase, hardware repairs and maintenance, ICT and curriculum training, and ICT development.

125. The level of service provision is covered as part of the larger financial and management SLA. The service has a user group through which it seeks to identify clients' views and resolve current and forthcoming problems. This group meets once per term. There are no other mechanisms through which the effectiveness of provision is assessed. Although the authority has a commitment to extend and develop its ICT provision, there is no formal ICT strategy.

126. The service faces a number of challenges and has just undergone a review by the Sunderland Performance Review Initiative. The LEA has already recognised that effective working of the service is impaired by lack of an overall ICT strategy, the need for a cohesive

management information system to support both schools and the Directorate, conflict and delays between departmental and corporate systems, and the growth of ad hoc solutions to solve individual ICT problems.

127. Schools' views of the LEA's ICT support services are varied. The school survey found that the majority of schools view the service as adequate or better, 10 consider it poor and 3 very poor. Interviews with headteachers found that they had a wide range of concerns with existing ICT provision. These included perceptions of a lack of ICT strategy, and dissatisfaction with the levels of service and hardware availability.

128. Net costs per pupil for ICT support services at £5.56 were seventh lowest of the LEAs in the sample. This compares to an average cost of £11.44 per pupil.

### ***Property-related services***

129. Funding for delegated property-related services is allocated by formula. This excludes expenditure relating to landlord repairs or the capital programme. The LEA has not undertaken a condition survey of its schools.

130. The LEA fulfils its client role on landlord repairs through a client-agent-contractor relationship. The client function rests with the LEA. The agents, who act as the link between the client department and the contractor, advise the LEA on the required maintenance for the forthcoming year and have responsibility for budget monitoring. Building maintenance and energy conservation in schools are covered by an SLA. Works may be undertaken by the Council's own building services or other approved contractors.

131. School visits and the school survey found a lower level of satisfaction with property-related services than other services provided by the LEA. Although, in total 40 of the 69 respondents rate the service as adequate or above, 18 rate it as poor and 10 as very poor. Issues commonly raised in schools during visits relate to delays in receiving responses to queries on both capital and maintenance work, delays in getting work completed, concerns with inadequate maintenance of the buildings, and the quality and cost of work when undertaken.

132. Several headteachers report frustration that they appear to have little or no control over the level of property-related service that they receive. This is of particular concern in schools faced by what the headteachers perceive as matters of health and safety for pupils or staff. Some headteachers view the level of service as such that they are considering alternative arrangements where delegation permits.

## **SECTION 5: SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN STANDARDS, QUALITY AND MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

### **IMPROVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS VISITED**

133. In order to inspect the contribution to school improvement made by the LEA, visits were made to 5 secondary schools, 14 primary schools, 2 nursery schools and 2 special schools. Briefer visits were made to one other primary and one other secondary school.

134. All of the schools are improving, at varying speeds. Teaching is becoming more closely matched to pupils' needs. School managers are making a clear drive to improve the work of the classroom. However these improvements have yet to have a substantial effect on performance in tests and examinations, except GCSE.

135. From the time of their inspections, and measured against the key issues for action in their reports, in four of the secondary schools there was a good measure of improvement but the amount of improvement since their inspections was more mixed in the fourth. In 11 of the primary schools improvement was good; it was mixed in 3. Improvement is being made in equal measure in the LEA's primary and secondary schools. Good improvement was being made in the nursery and special schools visited.

136. The effectiveness of the LEA's support for the schools was more varied because it is not geared closely enough to the school's needs. It was good in two of the secondary schools, mixed in two and weak in the fifth. It was good in six of the primary schools, mixed in four of them and weak in four. It was good in the nursery schools and mixed in the special schools.

### **SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN TEACHING**

137. OFSTED inspections show the quality of teaching in Sunderland's schools is better than in the country as a whole. There are particular strengths in the teaching of the under-fives and, in secondary schools, teaching is better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3, because expectations of pupils are higher. In most of the schools visited, teaching is improving. Where there is no improvement, the schools are sustaining already high quality.

138. Effective school management has been crucial in the process of improvement, particularly where managers have been actively involved in the evaluation and development of teaching in the classroom. A greater variety of teaching methods, more closely matched to pupils' individual needs, is characteristic of the changes. Most of this work has been done by senior managers rather than by secondary heads of departments or by primary subject co-ordinators. The improvement of teaching is beginning to figure more prominently in schools' development plans but there was only one secondary school visited where the focus of improvement had been particularly on Key Stage 3 and on improving expectations there. In all schools, primary and secondary, effective arrangements for the induction of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) were making a good contribution to the improvement.

139. The LEA's contribution to the improvements varies from school to school but, since the schools' headteachers and their work in introducing classroom observation have been so important, the priority the department attaches, in its in-service training programme, to encouraging classroom observation by headteachers has been well chosen. In nearly all of the schools visited, the in-service training programme for all teachers has, more broadly, been a factor leading to improvement. In primary schools, the early work done towards the introduction of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy has already begun to improve teaching.

140. The contribution of advisory work in the schools themselves has been more mixed, depending on the availability of the help. A substantial amount of help has been available in mathematics and it has led to improvement, particularly in the emphasis now given to mental mathematics in an increasing number of primary schools. In one school, teaching had improved across the curriculum in general, as a result of a whole school review. Intensive advisory help, well geared to the schools' needs, produced results. However, the specific help needed by individual schools is not always available, sometimes because of gaps in subject coverage and sometimes because the need has not been identified. The LEA acts effectively to deal with serious weaknesses in teaching identified in individual schools (see paragraph 193, below) but is insufficiently proactive in dealing with problems which are to be found more generally in the system or less severe weaknesses in individual schools.

141. The LEA's work to improve teaching provides satisfactory value in most of the schools visited. To improve more generally, the LEA should seek to strengthen the work of subject leaders in schools in the same way that it has strengthened the work of headteachers. It should also become more proactive in identifying and dealing with weakness.

## **SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT THROUGH SCHOOL REVIEWS**

142. The effectiveness of the school reviews conducted by the advisors varies considerably. In the schools visited, they made their greatest contribution to improvement where they were closely related to aspects of the work of the schools which had been identified in the inspection report as requiring improvement.

143. At best the reviews are rigorously conducted and produce illuminating reports which the schools are using as a basis on which to conduct their own programmes for improvement. This is a particularly powerful tool where the school has acknowledged problems to be dealt with, and has been used to good effect in one particular school, designated as having serious weaknesses. In such schools, the review coincides with the school's own priorities for improvement. Some primary school surveys, being conducted as part of the LEA's monitoring procedures, do not meet the schools' needs in the same way. Further difficulties arise where schools request reviews which they see themselves as needing for developmental reasons, sometimes following an inspection, because the monitoring priorities of the advisory service, or the pressures on advisory time, do not allow the service to respond to the schools' needs.

44. The LEA also intends the reviews to provide the schools with the capacity for self-evaluation. There was no clear evidence that the reviews are making this contribution in the schools visited. The schools are not modelling their own improvement work on the review process. They are beginning to develop this part of their work, but rather more in response to the LEA's in-service training programme, particularly its emphasis on classroom observation, than in response to the review system.

145. The review procedures do not promote school improvement consistently. If they are to provide value for money in all cases they need to be targeted more accurately at schools' weaknesses and priorities for development.

## **THE USE OF PERFORMANCE DATA AND TARGET-SETTING**

146. Work on the use of performance data and target-setting is at an early stage of development in the LEA. Although the quality of much of the work of the schools on assessment is shown by OFSTED inspections to be at least sound, most of the schools visited were not well placed to begin target-setting work. The LEA has made a late start on preparing schools for the work.

147. Nearly all of the schools visited had recently made some improvements in the use of data to raise standards, but most of them were working from low baselines. The weakness in the schools' improvement strategies is that, although their development and action plans sometimes refer to improving performance in tests and examinations, they do not set out precisely what is to be achieved and by what degree of improvement in performance their success is to be judged.

148. The developments taking place in the schools were nearly all in isolated areas of activity, rather than as the result of any coherent whole school approach. Exceptionally, one secondary school had used data analysis very effectively to change its arrangements for grouping pupils. More often, the schools used data solely to keep track of strengths and weaknesses in subject teaching. Secondary schools are at a more advanced stage of development than primaries, but some primary schools have become more aware of the issues as a result of early work by the LEA on literacy and numeracy. In both phases, there were some good, if isolated, examples of the use of data as a result of the recent influence of subject advisers.

149. Other recent in-service training activities have led to an increase in classroom observation as a tool for schools' senior and, to a lesser extent, middle managers to use in improving teaching. So far the LEA has not led the schools to formulate the vital connection between these activities and measurable improvements in performance. The policy and research unit has made much useful performance data available to the schools but schools have not been provided with adequate guidance on its use. At the time of the school visits there was no agreed system or set of procedures for schools to follow in using the data with which they had been supplied. This left those schools which were most ready to move forward having to devise procedures for themselves and so led to inefficient use of teachers' time.

150. The LEA's slow start in the use and analysis of performance data means that it has a considerable task to do to bring all of its schools to the point at which they will be able to set targets for themselves.

## **SUPPORT FOR EARLY YEARS PROVISION**

151. Two nursery schools and four nursery classes attached to infant and primary schools were visited because of the LEA's considerable investment in early years education. The inspection reports on the schools were, in the main, favourable about the standards achieved and the progress made by children in nursery and reception classes, sometimes from a low baseline of ability on entry. In all but one of the nursery classes visited there was evidence of some improvement, usually as a result of the LEA's contribution.

152. In line with its early years development plan, the LEA has redesignated four of its 11 nursery schools as community nurseries with the intention of offering a variety of attendance patterns, with some full-time places and some with an extended day. In the community nursery visited this flexibility of attendance was not offered. Uncertainties exist about the LEA's objectives in respect of community nurseries, their long-term development and the criteria by which some have been selected for community status.

153. From a strong basis which includes good accommodation and resource levels, most of the schools visited were improving in the following areas: curricular development and planning to take account of desirable learning outcomes; the use of basis assessments; quality of teaching; management and leadership; and the introduction of specific projects, such as 'Talk, Talk', funded as part of regeneration work. The LEA's contribution to these improvements is considerable, particularly the advisory service's specialist expertise. However, the cessation of early years advisory teacher support has prevented the more sustained involvement which was formerly possible.

154. LEA reviews conducted in both of the nursery schools have moved the schools forward and encouraged the professional development of staff. The Effective Early Learning project has made a valuable contribution. So also has 'Talk, Talk' and the developmental work for the introduction of the baseline assessment scheme.

155. Overall, the LEA gives at least satisfactory and often good value in its support for under-fives. The LEA's contribution has resulted in pupils entering Key Stage 1 with a good foundation of knowledge and learning which they would have missed if there had not been the LEA investment in nursery provision. Some general weaknesses do exist, including the apparent absence of an overview of take-up rates of nursery provision, a lack of guidance on admissions and how nurseries might fill places, and the absence of a clearly articulated strategy for community nursery education. Specific weaknesses are evident in some schools in a lack of advice and support for pupils with special educational needs, the slow statementing process in this phase, and the absence of subject-specific guidance from general advisers, who are perceived to lack expertise in the pre-school age range.

## **SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN LITERACY**

156. Standards of literacy, as measured by the National Curriculum tests in English and by GCSE examinations in English, are slightly lower than national averages at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and lower than national averages at Key Stage 3. In recent years the gap between national and LEA figures at Key Stage 3 has been decreasing.

157. The LEA has made significant efforts to improve standards in literacy recently. Work has been completed already started in a trial group of schools and is being extended to the remaining schools following the summer term's in-service training. The LEA's strategy is to incorporate six other, smaller-scale projects related to literacy at home and at school which have been part of the education components of the City Challenge and SRB projects. The quality of the initial training is good.

158. The LEA's target for 2002 aspires to a rise in the proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 from 61% (1997) to 85% (2002). This is a very significant rise in standards over the five years.

159. This inspection evaluated the LEA's contribution to improvements in literacy in nine schools: one infant school, one junior school, four primaries and three secondaries. There were no strengths or weaknesses common to all schools and the progress pupils made in the various aspects of literacy varied from school to school. Standards are now rising in six of the nine schools and static in two. In one case there was a deterioration.

160. There was some evidence of improvement in the quality of literacy provision in every school visited. Action taken by schools included refinement of assessment systems, an audit of provision, the introduction of target-setting, the early introduction of the literacy hour, intervention to support pupils with problems in literacy, and the enrichment of resources. In three cases the improvements appear to be associated with the recent appointment of new staff in key positions of middle management. Many of the improvements were due to the schools' own determination to move forward.

161. Most of the schools visited made at least a reasonable use of the services available to them from the LEA. Four of the five schools which were improving had made reasonable or good use of these services, whereas neither of the schools making little use of them were improving at a good rate. In general, although there are strengths in the LEA's provision of in-service training and its management of some projects, the provision of long-term help, fitted to schools' individual needs is weak. A common weakness was that, apart from some help with the generalities of action planning, there is a lack of specific advice on how to address particular issues related to literacy that have arisen from OFSTED inspection or the school development plan. It was not always clear to schools that the LEA possessed the expertise relevant to every phase and it was apparent from several schools that there had been little work in the school by LEA advisers monitoring standards and providing guidance. In some cases, the schools did not need extensive support from the LEA, but one secondary with low literacy levels had received too little support in addressing its problems, and a primary which had to address a literacy issue had received no follow-up from the LEA since its inspection.

162. Overall, the LEA has contributed well or very well to the improvements two schools have made, but its role has been minor in the improvements made by six other schools. Its relative strengths are its in-service provision and its provision of particular projects and services. Its weakness lies in its lack of detailed monitoring of schools' progress or the provision of support appropriate to their circumstances and in a failure, as yet, to provide secondary schools with

the guidance they need to begin more systematic teaching of literacy.

### **SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN NUMERACY**

163. At the ends of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, Sunderland's results in mathematics are close to those attained nationally but, as in English and science, they are lower than the national average at the end of Key Stage 3. In all of the schools visited to inspect work in this aspect of the curriculum some improvements in teaching were evident but these improvements have yet to have a consistent outcome in improved attainment.

164. The LEA has made an effective early start on the move towards the national numeracy strategy and the schools visited had all seized on the LEA's provision. This includes the dissemination of the National Numeracy Project (NNP) Framework for teaching to all primary schools and an emphasis on mental mathematics. This increased emphasis has resulted in the publication of guidance for primary and secondary schools on mental mathematics, an in-service training programme, and advice and guidance on planning. Preparation for, and encouragement of, whole-class teaching and the numeracy hour has included the appointment of a numeracy consultant from September 1998, with further support consisting of in-service training and a large amount of written guidance. A Family Numeracy Project, funded by the SRB, has also been initiated in the areas of greatest need in the City.

165. In secondary schools, there have been some improvements in the teaching of mathematics itself, as the result of the introduction of Cognitive Acceleration in Mathematics. There have also been some moves towards the more systematic teaching of numeracy in other subjects of the curriculum but these are at a very early stage and occur in isolated subjects rather than as the result of consistent whole-school drives toward improvement. One secondary school has already produced a draft curriculum document on numeracy.

166. There have also been improvements in primary schools, particularly in the teaching of mental mathematics and in those schools where co-ordinators, sometimes newly appointed, have been receptive to change. The schools have planned well to bring about improvements. In both phases, the LEA has played a significant part in bringing about improvement. The guidance documents and materials it has produced are in active use and support, in the form of advisory teaching, has had an impact on

classroom teaching. Its in-service training has been particularly effective, especially where teachers have good systems for disseminating to their colleagues what has been learnt on the courses. The consultancy work has also been very effective. Its strength has been in delivering timely support fitted well to the particular needs of the schools.

167. It is too early to assess the impact of the LEA's recent support to improve numeracy but a good start has been made and the work in this area is managed very well.

## **THE USE OF CITY CHALLENGE FUNDING TO SUPPORT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

168. During the period 1993 to 1998, schools in a disadvantaged part of North Sunderland were supported by funds from City Challenge, a major, externally-funded initiative aimed to combat and remedy the effects of social and economic deprivation. Overall, educational spending accounted for only a minor proportion of the City Challenge activities (for instance, about 20% of the total during the last three years); nevertheless, this produced significant additional sums available to the education system. The distribution of these funds was the responsibility of the City Challenge administration rather than of the LEA. The LEA's role has been to support schools in making good use of the money.

169. Inspectors visited five schools that had been supported by City Challenge: one secondary, one special, two primaries and one nursery school. This sample represented about a quarter of the schools involved in the initiative. The schools serve a population with many signs of disadvantage: large numbers of pupils are entitled to free school meals; unemployment is high; the proportion of the local adult population with higher educational qualifications is small, and pupils' attainment on entering school is often below average. This is an area which clearly merits additional support.

170. The schools visited had received support in a number of ways. Small collections of learning resources were loaned to parents of nursery and reception children to promote the use of talk in the home. A reading intervention scheme gave additional help to Year 3 pupils whose reading skills were under-developed. Some funding was distributed to assist schools with improvements to their accommodation and equipment. An education social worker developed circle time and anti-bullying work, and assisted in school policy development. Various sports development initiatives took place. A business education officer worked in two secondaries, building links with local businesses and devising strategies to encourage improved attendance, punctuality and commitment to work. This latter project also involved orienting pupils to the possibilities of further and higher education, and helping them to see what local employers wanted from young people. Overall, running through many of the City Challenge projects, there is a consistent strand of educational enrichment and improved liaison between schools and the world of work.

171. The inspection showed that some of these initiatives have been valuable and have aided school improvement. Provision for under-fives has been enhanced by the loan schemes. These projects appear to have been a catalyst for some families in bringing parents or other adults into greater involvement in their children's learning. The reading intervention has also clearly been helpful in two schools, both in term of support for individual pupils and as a model for school managers of how such interventions can be planned and operated. One primary valued strongly the specialist support provided in personal and social education. Additional funding has enabled useful expansion of accommodation in at least two schools. Business links and the promotion of the local business education council targets for Key Stage 4 pupils are having a beneficial effect in the secondary school visited. Schools report that there has been improvement in the reading skills of primary pupils supported by the Reading in Partnership programme, and that secondary pupils who worked with business mentors tended to achieve much greater success than others in meeting their targets.

172. The value of some other initiatives is difficult to discern, particularly where, according to the schools, funding, equipment or expertise arrived from City Challenge, sometimes without much warning, to develop programmes that had been devised centrally but did not necessarily match the schools' own priorities. Some funding of this kind has been wasteful. Some headteachers also experienced frustration in seeking to bid for City Challenge funding to promote developments which were more in line with their own objectives. They report difficulty in keeping track of the changing priorities and bidding systems of City Challenge. At least two schools have responded to the expiry of City Challenge funding by continuing initiatives from their own budget, but this is not always possible and there is a danger that some useful projects may now wither.

173. The LEA had a difficult role to play in this situation. In some instances it has been the crucial and beneficial provider of specialist expertise, as in the under-fives and reading projects. In others, its involvement has been slight and projects have been left to make their own way. It has sometimes helped schools to frame their funding bids and this support has been valued. However, it does not appear to have been able to maintain a central overview of the initiatives in order to ensure that what was provided matched schools' individual needs. The LEA has monitored some of the projects but in general this has not been a strong feature. If similar major projects develop in the future, the LEA needs to clarify its role at their inception, and ensure that it is in a position to take a more strategic role in their management. There are already signs that it has a clearer management role in new local projects currently under development.

## **SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING ATTENDANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

174. Attendance in secondary schools is poorer in Sunderland than the national average but an improvement of one percent overall, occurred last year. The attendance rate is 89.7% compared with 90.9%.

175. The newly introduced, staged process is welcomed by the schools visited and in some cases has positively changed their internal practices and staffs involvement with non-attenders. It is only the persistent non-attenders who are now going through to the later stages. Responsibilities are clearly defined and the procedures identify where the school and the LEA interact and ensure that governors and parents are involved appropriately. The impact is more limited, although slight improvements are noted in all schools. Schools do report, however, that, in some cases, the LEA is slow in the latter stages of the procedure. Nevertheless, the procedures are having a positive effect.

176. The ESW service provides policy and procedures guidance of which schools are appreciative. It is clear that ESWs are valued and that they conscientiously fulfil their role of monitoring and following up persistent non-attenders. However, schools are sometimes critical of the small amount of time allocated to them. There are significant variations in the level of provision which are not always closely related to the needs identified. This reduces the overall effectiveness of the service.

177. All of the schools have taken additional measures to improve attendance, particularly in Key Stage 4. Arrangements for monitoring and following up absence have improved, primarily as a result of LEA guidance. Nevertheless, poor attendance in Key Stage 4 continues to have a negative impact on some pupils' academic performance and on the progress of low attaining pupils.

178. A strength of the LEA has been the provision of guidance on new procedures for dealing with non-attendance and unauthorised absence, upon which schools can base their work.

179. A weakness has been the absence of productive discussions between the LEA and schools where attendance has been identified as a key issue, in order to identify the underlying causes of non-attendance and to work collaboratively to seek solutions. In one school with persistently low attendance, there was a tendency for staff to blame the local estate's culture of non-conformity, anti-school attitudes and crime, while the pupils blamed bullying and the lack of relevance of the school to their own lives. There was no coherent strategy to take account of the need of both sides to start looking and moving in the same direction.

180. Few schools have had any advisory help in looking at the issue of attendance more strategically, for example through reviewing the upper school curriculum. Some schools clearly need to tackle curriculum changes to meet the needs of those pupils in Year II for whom the curriculum is not appropriate.

181. There is insufficient analysis of pupils' non-attendance and the outcome of actions taken. Records are sometimes taken by each year head but these are not often translated into a whole school context. Although the LEA is not currently tackling the underlying issues of attitudes to education within the community and of curriculum development, it has been successful in terms of initiating a process whereby parents are accountable for their children being in school and in the good support provided through the ESW service.

## **SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF SCHOOLS**

### ***Support for management***

182. OFSTED inspections show the quality of the management in Sunderland's schools is higher than that nationally. The inspections also show some specific weaknesses in individual schools. The weaknesses most often found are at the middle management level and particularly at the level of subject leadership in primary schools. In both primary and secondary schools, the weakness most frequently cited is a failure to monitor and evaluate teaching but a number of schools have recently developed new strengths in this area. The management of the schools is improving but the LEA's support for that improvement is uneven in effectiveness.

183. The appointment of new staff or the better use of existing staff, particularly middle managers, has been central to the process of improvement and the LEA has provided effective support with new appointments. In other respects, the quality of the LEA's support is more mixed. There are some unmet management development needs at all levels, in both primary and secondary schools. In some schools, for example, the LEA's in-service training programme's emphasis on monitoring and evaluation has clearly helped the schools to improve. In others the engine of change has been the headteacher, working independently of the LEA. Although in-service training for headteachers has, with some exceptions, been effective, the deputy heads of primary schools are the single group with the greatest unmet needs. Exceptions here were in those schools where the headteacher had particular skills in staff development and was able to use the nature of the assignments given to the deputy to develop that person as a manager.

184. In many schools, there were examples of helpful support from the LEA. In the secondary phase, the courses for senior staff on the management of the curriculum were particularly valued by the schools. In both primary and secondary schools there were also examples of effective work by subject advisers in schools where there had been particular weaknesses. Work on school development planning in the past has also paid off, although it has not led schools to evaluate the success of their development work in raising pupils' attainment.

185. Helpful though much of this has been, in some of the schools visited, senior staff were aware of weaknesses but felt they could not get help from the LEA to deal with them. In others, inspectors identified weaknesses of which the schools themselves were not aware and which the LEA had not drawn to the schools' attention. This problem was particularly striking in schools which were basically managed well but which were not being challenged to improve yet more.

186. The value provided by the LEA's support for management is mostly at least satisfactory but it varies according to how well the support is fitted to the need of the school. If it is to improve, the analysis of need will have to improve.

### ***Support for action planning***

187. The quality of support for action planning is very mixed. In the schools visited it was very good in three schools, good in five, satisfactory in six, unsatisfactory in four, and poor in one. There was variation in the quality of support within each phase, but the primary, infant and junior schools generally received the lowest level of support, with unsatisfactory or poor provision in over a third of cases.

188. Where the LEA's support was good, most of the schools had received valuable support from advisers or staff inspectors in designing their action plan, or in linking what they had learned from the inspection to their longer-term development planning. In some cases, this involved helping the school to interpret the report and its implications. The support given to these schools is effective: all produced plans which were at least satisfactory, if lacking in precise targets for improvement in pupils' academic performance. Some schools had also benefited from a review of the school undertaken by the advisers between OFSTED inspections. At best, this had enabled the school to measure the success it had achieved in addressing certain of the key issues in the inspection. These are examples of good practice but too few schools with particular needs receive an adequate level of support after their inspections.

### ***Support for governing bodies***

189. OFSTED inspections show Sunderland's schools to be governed well. Most governing bodies provide good support and leadership for the schools and take an active part in the schools' decision-making processes. They are sometimes also strong in the part they play in monitoring and evaluating the work of the schools. This is not always the case and, at the time of the inspection, a failure to involve themselves in this type of work was the most frequent weakness in governance.

190. Governing bodies are improving in this part of their work. In many of the schools visited they are developing better knowledge of the closer links with the day-to-day working of the school and are monitoring its quality more effectively. To do this, they are beginning to assign responsibility to individual governors to exercise oversight of particular subjects, or requiring teachers with middle management roles to report on their areas to the governing body.

191. Governors value the support they receive from the LEA. Some governors find it difficult to attend the in-service training provided for them because of its timing, but most find the in-service training effective. It has helped them to deal with their changing roles and responsibilities as well as to understand and respond to such new initiatives as the LEA's strategy to improve literacy. The clerking system is effective in keeping governors well informed: the flow of information is good. Governors have also been supported well when dealing with matters of personnel management. The LEA's support for governing bodies is effective.

### ***Support for schools with serious weaknesses***

192. The advisory service attaches major priority to improving these schools and is successful in the work. One of its three schools in special measures has recently been removed from that category.

193. Key to the LEA's success in dealing with these schools is the clear identification of needs and the mobilisation of a wide range of services to meet them. Where there are problems with staffing or with financial management, appropriate management support services work speedily and effectively. The advisory service has particularly close involvement. There is effective assistance for the school's management and its governing body in drawing up a clear action plan and then, through consultancy, including inspection of progress made in the improvement of teaching, and through in-service training, with putting it into operation. The school's progress in meeting its plans for action is then systematically monitored and reported back to school. This part of the work is particularly important for the opportunity it gives the school to see plans through to action effectively.

194. The intensive support provided for these schools is necessarily much greater than that provided for schools without such weaknesses. It is costly but, being effective, it delivers satisfactory value for money. Intervention is according to an identified need. Clearly it would be neither efficient, nor necessary, to provide such a level of support more generally after an inspection. However, its effectiveness contrasts with the unmet needs in many other schools for support after inspection, particularly in drawing up action plans and in monitoring progress towards putting them into practice.

## APPENDIX I

## CONTEXT OF THE LEA

### (a) Characteristics of the pupil population

Indicator	Date	Source	LEA	National
1. Number of pupils in LEA area of compulsory school age				
2. Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	1997	DfEE	primary 32.7 secondary 25.7	22.8 18.2
3. Percentage of pupils living in households with parents/carers				
(i) with Higher Educational qualifications	1991	Census	8.3	13.5
(ii) in Social Class 1 and 2	1991	Census	17.2	31.0
4. Ethnic Minorities in population aged 5-15. Percentage of ethnic group:				
Asian			0.1	0.5
Bangladeshi			0.5	0.8
Black African			0.0	0.6
Black Caribbean			0.1	1.1
Black Other	1991	Census	0.1	0.8
Chinese			0.2	0.4
Indian			0.4	2.7
Other			0.1	1.1
Pakistani			0.1	2.1
White			93.8	89.9
5. Percentage of pupils:				
(i) with a statement of SEN			3.1	2.6
primary	1997	DfEE	4.2	3.9
secondary				
(ii) attending special school			1.6	1.1
primary			2.2	1.6
secondary				
6. Participation in education:				
(i) % pupils under-5 on the roll of a maintained school	1995	Audit Commission	82	58
(ii) % pupils aged 16 remaining in full time education.	1997	LEA	51.9	67.4

**(b) Organisation of schools**

1. Type of school:

Type of School	Number
Nursery schools	11
Infant schools	12
Junior schools	12
Junior and Infant schools	73
Middle schools	0
Secondary schools 11-16	14
11-18	3
Special schools	8
Pupil Referral Units	1

2. Pupil/teacher ratio:

Pupil/teacher ratio	Year	LEA	National
All	1997	18.8	19.6
Nursery	1997	20.4	19.2
Primary	1997	22.8	23.4
Secondary	1997	16.3	16.7 —
Special	1997	7.6	6.2

Source: DfEE

### 3. Class size

Rate per 1000 classes

Size of class		Year	LEA	National
31 or more	KS1	1997	130.5	289.6
KS2		1997	235.5	379.0
36 or more	KS1	1997	6.9	22.9
KS2		1997	10.2	35.0

4. Surplus places

Surplus places	Year	% surplus places
Primary	1997	12.62
Secondary	1997	11.08

c) Finance

Indicator	Source	Year	LEA	National
% expenditure in relation to standard spending assessment	Audit Commission	1997/8	96%	102%
Funding per pupil: £perpupil Primary 0-4 5-6 7-10	CIPFA	1996/7	£1390 £1317 £1153	£1279 £1180 £1149
£perpupil Secondary 11-13 14-15 16+	CIPFA	1996/7	£1831 £1912 £2323	£1567 £1931 £2440
Aggregated schools budget: £ per pupil Primary Secondary Special	CIPFA	1996/7	£1514 £2098 £5955	£1486 £2053 £7945
General schools budget: £ per pupil Primary Secondary Special	CIPFA	1996/7	£2002 £2600 £8290	£2022 £2694 £12595
Potential schools budget: Primary			£1625 £2212	£1665 £2233

Secondary Special	CIPFA	1996/7	£6334	£8819
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## APPENDIX 2: THE PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOLS

### PUPILS' ATTAINMENT

#### 1. Attainment at age 7: KS1 Teacher Assessment

	Year	% of pupils achieving Level 2 or above					
		Teacher Assessment			Tasks/tests		
		National	LEA	Difference	National	LEA	Difference
English	1996	79.3	77.3	-1.9			
	1997	80.4	77.9	-2.5			
English (reading)	1996	78.6	77.1	-1.5	78.0	76.8	-1.3
	1997	80.1	77.1	-2.9	80.1	77.8	-2.3
English (writing)	1996	76.6	74.2	-2.4	77.3	79.7	-2.4
	1997	77.5	75.3	-2.2	78.4	80.4	-2.1
Mathematics	1996	81.8	82.2	0.7	82.1	82.4	0.3
	1997	83.4	84.2	0.8	83.7	83.7	0
Science	1996	84.1	82.9	-1.2			
	1997	85.5	84.5	-1.0			

Source: DfEE

#### 2. Attainment at age 11: KS2 tests/tasks

	Year	% of pupils achieving Level 4 or above					
		Teacher assessment			- Task/tests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1996	60.1	61.7	1.7	54.8	57.1	-2.3

	1997	63.4	63.6	0.2	60.6	63.2	-2.6
Mathematics	1996	61.8	59.9	1.9	52.4	53.9	-1.5
	1997	65.6	64.1	1.5	63.6	62.0	1.7
Science	1996	67.4	66.1	2.3	58.7	62.0	-3.3
	1997	72.6	69.5	3.2	70.9	68.8	2.1

source: DfEE

### 3. Attainment at age 14: KS3 tests/tasks

	Year	% pupils achieving Level 5 or above					
		Teacher assessment			Task/tests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English Level 5 and above	1996	57.0	60.3	-0.1	49.6	56.6	-6.9
	1997	59.0	60.2	5.7	51.7	56.6	-4.9
Mathematics Level 5 and above	1996	53.9	61.5	-7.6	49.5	56.7	-7.2
	1997	56.2	64.0	-7.8	51.6	60.7	-9.1
Science Level 5 and above	1996	56.3	59.7	-3.4	48.5	56.4	-7.9
	1997	57.1	62.2	-5.1	51.4	60.8	-9.7

Source: DfEE

### 4. Attainment at age 16: GCSE results in maintained schools

Level achieved	Year	LEA	National	Difference
1 A-G	1995	91.4	93.5	-2.2
	1996	91.0	93.9	-2.9
	1997	93.7	94.0	-0.3
5A-C	1995	31.7	41.2	-9.5
	1996	32.4	42.6	-10.2
	1997	35.2	43.3	-8.0
A-G	1995	83.1	87.5	-4.4
	1996	83.9	88.1	-4.1
	1997	85.8	88.5	-2.7

Pupils aged 15 at the beginning of the school year and on the roll in January of that year Source DfEE

### 5. Attainment at age 18: A level results Average point score per pupil

Number entered	Year	LEA	National	Difference
2 or more	1995	17.3	15.9	1.4
	1996	17.4	16.8	0.6
	1997	15.6	17.1	-1.5
Less than 2	1995	2.8	2.7	0.1
	1996	2.9	2.7	0.3
	1997	2.8	2.7	0.1

Source:  
DfEE

## 6. Vocational qualifications of 16 to 18 year olds

Level achieved	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Pass entries	1995	100	80.2	19.8
Pass entries (Advanced)	1996	92.6	79.3	13.2
	1997	87.7	75.4	12.3
Pass entries (Intermediate)	1996	100	69.1	30.9
	1997	89	68.9	20.1

Source:  
DfEE

Figures show the percentage of students who were in the final year of a course leading to approved vocational qualifications who achieved them on the basis of the work done in that year.

## 7. Attendance

	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Attendance in primary schools	1996	93.2	93.4	-0.2
	1997	93.6	93.9	-0.3
Attendance in secondary schools	1996	88.5	9.5	-1.9
	1997	89.7	90.9	-1.2

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