



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN  
EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF  
KINGSTON UPON HULL  
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the  
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Kingston upon Hull local education authority (LEA) 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* (December 2001). The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at the local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA published in 1999. A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to all schools and pupil referral units (PRUs), and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 67 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to three primary schools and four secondary schools. Those visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, and is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

## Commentary

4. Kingston upon Hull City Council serves an increasingly disadvantaged area with half of its wards among the ten per cent most deprived nationally. Unemployment exceeds twice the national average. Although there is evidence in the city centre of the impact of urban regeneration, this has failed to halt the decline in the population or generate, within the locality, high aspirations for educational achievement. Residents continue to move house frequently leading to high mobility among the school-age population.

5. Since the previous inspection, standards of attainment in primary schools had continued to improve until this year, when there was an overall dip in attainment levels at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards of attainment in secondary schools have improved at both key stages, but insufficiently. The LEA continues to languish at the bottom of the national league table for the proportion of pupils achieving higher General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades. This is a cause of particular concern for the council, which is committed to improving the attainment of pupils in its secondary schools.

6. The LEA was previously inspected in 1999. At that time, the new unitary authority had a clear strategy for improvement and for tackling areas of weakness in its schools. However, the strategy did not lead to the improvements in attainment required in the LEA's secondary schools. Nevertheless, the LEA has been successful at supporting those schools identified by Ofsted as requiring formal intervention; only three schools now remain in this category compared with 15 in 1999. Following the decision of the then director of education to resign, there was some loss of impetus and focus on further improvement, in particular, in the introduction of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative and on developing effective working relationships with key partners. As the council was slow to recruit a replacement director of learning services, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was approached for assistance. An interim manager was appointed on a part-time basis for a three-month period. He prepared the ground for the improvement now evident in learning services. In particular, he worked effectively to improve relationships with partners. Nevertheless, progress generally in the last three years has been too slow, although much improved in the last year.

7. A new director of learning services took up post in December 2001. He has built upon the work of the interim manager most effectively. Not only is he highly respected throughout the council, but he is trusted by his officers who now feel empowered to fulfil their delegated roles and responsibilities. The climate in learning services has changed markedly for the better and there is, rightly, a confidence that the improvements still required will be achieved. Significant progress has been made in a number of areas: relationships with schools have improved, performance management arrangements have been strengthened and greater clarity has been brought to the strategic planning in learning services. There is considerable momentum driving improvement. The leadership of learning services is strong and is having a significant impact not only within education and lifelong learning, but across the council as a whole.

8. Most of the recommendations of the previous inspection report have now been addressed. The LEA's new Education Development Plan (EDP) is good. Relationships with partners are improving and major issues, such as the closure of schools to remove surplus places and the 14-19 agenda, are being addressed. There is effective practice in the Education Action Zone (EAZ). Moreover, the workings of the LEA are more transparent than previously and there are much improved arrangements for consultation and communication.

9. The effectiveness of the work of learning services is undermined by shortcomings in the city council's work, detailed in the council's corporate governance inspection report<sup>1</sup> published this summer and in its corporate assessment<sup>2</sup>. These reports emphasis the difficulties councillors face in working collaboratively on areas for improvement. While all parties agree with the priorities for education, political wrangling undermines the ability of the current administration to move forward with confidence supported by adequate resources. Consequently, despite learning services' strong capacity to improve, weaknesses at the corporate centre make the LEA's capacity in this area only satisfactory overall.

10. Although the majority of the functions of the council, as the LEA, are performed to at least a satisfactory standard and a significant number are highly satisfactory, there are too many weaknesses that make the LEA's work overall unsatisfactory. Strengths include:

- support for schools with serious weaknesses or those deemed to require special measures;
- support to schools in raising standards in numeracy;
- support for early years; and
- health, safety, welfare and child protection.

11. Most of the LEA's weak functions were not inspected in 1999. In the majority of cases, current weaknesses result from the slowness of the council to drive forward developments corporately thus undermining effective progress within learning services. For example, learning services has, sensibly, started to drive forward improvements on its own initiative in measures to tackle racism, improve planning and promote continuous improvement, including Best Value. Functions that are weak primarily as a result of corporate deficiencies have, in the main, already been identified as such in the corporate governance inspection report. They include:

- the extent to which the LEA has in place strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value;
- support for the use of ICT in school administration;
- property services and grounds maintenance;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion and in particular, in combating racism;
- admissions to schools;
- clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans;

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<sup>1</sup> *Kingston upon Hull City Council Corporate Governance Inspection June 2002*, Audit Commission

<sup>2</sup> *Kingston upon Hull City Council Corporate Assessment September 2002*, Audit Commission

- the effectiveness of procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans; and
- the speed and effectiveness of decision making.

12. The few areas of weakness that are located within learning services include:

- support for the use of ICT in the curriculum;
- support to schools in raising standards of minority ethnic pupils and Traveller children;
- support to schools for gifted and talented pupils; and
- support to schools for improving behaviour.

13. To bring about improvement, there needs to be a clear focus and commitment by the council on the key work to be undertaken to embed school improvement and raise standards. There is a willingness among partners to support improvement and all schools must now embrace the leadership and direction provided by learning services. Corporate issues must be addressed so as to enable learning services to build upon its successes in the past 12 months. The LEA has the capacity to improve and tackle the recommendations in this report - and councillors must support it to do so. In addition, those recommendations arising from the corporate governance inspection that impact on the work of learning services must also be addressed, as detailed in the council's action plan. The council should be monitored closely over the next two years to ensure that the progress this inspection team believes is possible is achieved.

## **SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Context**

14. Kingston upon Hull, a unitary authority formally established in 1996, serves a declining population that currently numbers 244,000<sup>3</sup>. Economically, the city has declined and it is now rated the 13<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in the country<sup>4</sup>. Half of the council's 20 wards fall within the ten per cent of those most deprived nationally and all are within the worst 50 per cent. The claimant unemployment rate at 6.7 per cent<sup>5</sup> has fallen since the previous inspection, but is still more than double the national average. Approximately two per cent of the population is from minority ethnic groups, which include an increasing number of asylum seekers.

15. In the last three years, the school age population has fallen to 35,847 pupils. These pupils are educated in the LEA's 78 maintained primary schools, 15 secondary schools and four all-age special schools. The LEA also maintains four pupil referral units, which include a unit for schoolgirl mothers. In addition to its three nursery schools, there are nursery classes attached to 55 primary schools. There is adequate provision for early years education: an average of 77 per cent of three-year olds accepted places during the 2001/02 academic year. Over the same period, the participation rates for four year-olds averaged 86 per cent. The proportion of 16 year-olds continuing into further or higher education has risen by ten percentage points in the last five years to 60.2 per cent, but is still well below the national average of over 70 per cent. A further education college, two sixth form colleges, one secondary school with a sixth form and a special school provide post-16 education.

16. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, at 30.6 per cent in primary schools and 28.6 per cent in secondary schools, are well above the national averages of 19.7 per cent and 17.6 per cent respectively. Pupil mobility remains high with over one-fifth of primary-aged pupils changing schools in 2001; the problem is exacerbated by the ease of access to alternative housing. However, there has been a marked reduction in the proportion of primary pupils moving out of the city for their secondary education; in 2002, 4.2 per cent of Year 6 pupils moved to schools in a neighbouring authority, half that of 1999. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs that are taught in mainstream schools is 2.3 per cent, which is well below the national figure of 3.1 per cent. The minority ethnic heritage school population is 1.4 per cent compared with a national average of 12.1 per cent.

### **Performance**

17. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools is supplied to the LEA annually in the form of a statistical profile compiled by Ofsted. Key features of schools' performance, and changes since the previous inspection, are as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> In 1999, the population was 260,000; the April 2001 census gives the population as 243,595.

<sup>4</sup> In 1998, the DETR index of multiple deprivation places Hull as 31<sup>st</sup>; in 2000 it was 13<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> November, 2001 data.



- pupils continue to enter primary schools with levels of attainment below those found nationally;
- the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 remains below the national average, but has improved at a faster rate than found nationally. Unvalidated results for 2002 indicate continued improvement;
- in 2001, the proportion of Key Stage 2 pupils achieving Level 4 or above equalled the national average in science (87 per cent), but at 69 per cent, was slightly below the national average of 71 per cent in mathematics. However, in English, 67 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 or above, which was well below the national average of 75 per cent. Provisional results for 2002 indicate no improvement in mathematics and a one percentage point fall in science and a two percentage point fall in English;
- although the rates of improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or better in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with national figures, levels of attainment remain well below national averages. In 2001, achievement in mathematics was best, yet only 51 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 or above compared with 67 per cent nationally. Provisional results for 2002 indicate a slight improvement;
- at Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades has increased from 24.7 per cent in 1999 to 28.9 per cent (unvalidated) in 2002. There has been little change in the other two performance measures, with the proportion of pupils achieving five+ A\*-G grades and one+ A\*-G grades declining slightly in the last two years;
- attendance in primary schools is just below the national average. Attendance in secondary schools has improved in the last three years, faster than in any other LEA. In 1999/2000 it was the worst in the country and it still remains well below the national average;
- in 2000/2001, permanent exclusions from both primary and secondary schools were below the national mean, but increased last year;
- currently, one primary school requires special measures, one primary school has serious weaknesses and a further one is underachieving; and
- six schools have been awarded Beacon status and four secondary schools have specialist school status.

## **Council structure**

18. Kingston upon Hull city council consists of 29 Liberal Democrats, 24 Labour, four Independent and two Conservative elected members. At the May 2002 elections, the council's political balance changed from Labour, where it had lain for many years, to no party having overall control.

19. In response to the government's modernising agenda, the council adopted, at an early stage, a cabinet structure. This was revised in 2002. The cabinet consists of the leader, deputy leader and eight portfolio members, seven of whom are drawn from the majority party. There is one portfolio holder for lifelong learning. There is one overview and scrutiny committee and four topic-based commissions including one for learning.

20. Seven area committees, comprising ward councillors, have been set up. Their monthly meetings are open to the public and learning services provides

schools' attendance data for these. A number of schools have taken advantage of funds available from area committees to improve their security arrangements, resource prize-giving events or facilitate community-based activities. However, not all schools are aware of the opportunities presented by area committees or of how to access their funds.

## Funding

21. The LEA's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per school-age pupil for 2002/2003 is broadly in line with the averages for statistical neighbours<sup>6</sup> and nationally, but about four per cent above the average for unitary authorities. Over the last five years the council has consistently spent marginally above SSA on education.

Financial Year	SSA for education (£M)	Planned expenditure on education (£M)	Planned expenditure as % of SSA
1999/2000	114.8	115.2	100.4
2000/2001	120.8	121.3	100.4
2001/2002	123.9	125.2	101.1
2002/2003	128.3	129.6	101.0

(Source: LEA Form 2 return for the inspection)

22. The LEA receives significant grants from the Standards Fund and other sources so that the local schools budget per primary pupil in 2001/2002 (£2,805) was considerably above the average for comparable LEAs (£2,696 for statistical neighbours, £2,594 for unitaries) and nationally (£2,695 for England). Planned expenditure per secondary pupil (£3,618) showed a similar pattern (£3,447 for statistical neighbours, £3,305 for unitaries and £3,403 nationally). In 2002/2003, overall funding of £3,238 per pupil is the seventh highest out of 45 unitary authorities, a higher ranking than at the time of the previous inspection when it was broadly in line with the unitary average.

23. Capital spending on schools has increased significantly since the previous inspection. Funds have been derived partly from additional DfES grants to support the removal of surplus places, but mainly from a share of the £255 million receipt from the flotation of the city's telecommunications company. The receipt has provided opportunities to improve the school building stock, although falling interest rates and poor management of the council's overall capital programme meant that, at the time of this inspection, that budget was over-committed and a moratorium on further spending was in place pending a reassessment of priorities.

<sup>6</sup> Statistical neighbours: Barking and Dagenham, City of Nottingham, Coventry, Halton, Middlesbrough, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Sandwell, Sunderland.

## **The LEA strategy for school improvement**

24. The LEA's strategy for school improvement, as set out in its second EDP, is good and has secured unconditional approval by the Secretary of State. The plan is based on a thorough audit and evaluation of the first EDP, which has resulted in the identification of priorities that largely match the national ones. The plan also includes, rightly, two local priorities: the recruitment and development of teachers and governors, and the development of a coherent strategy for 14-19 education.

25. The level of detail in the plan generates confidence in the LEA's ability to progress the actions within it. There is a clear link between audit and actions, with key indicators for success plainly identified. Although there is an appropriate balance between actions identified for all schools and targeted action, the latter is insufficiently focused at those most in need. The planning structure is good with succinct actions, success criteria, lead officer responsibility and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. Links with other key improvement plans such as those for the Education Action Zone, Excellence in Cities and the Early Years and Childcare Development Plan are suitably referenced.

26. The 2004 attainment targets are extremely challenging. Although individual pupil data indicates that these targets are achievable, it is unlikely, based on current progress, that they can be met. Attainment in English at Key Stage 2 has increased by only two percentage points since 2000 and has regressed this year: a 17-percentage point increase is required to meet the target of 82 per cent in 2004. Key Stage 3 targets require a 14-percentage point increase in English in the next two years. At GCSE, the LEA has seen a 4.3 percentage point increase in the proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher grades during the last three years; its 2004 target requires a further 13.1 percentage point increase on the 2002 results.

27. Progress overall on the implementation of EDP1 was satisfactory with some notable success in reducing the number of schools in special measures, with serious weaknesses or causing concern. Nevertheless, the impact of activities to raise standards of attainment, especially at Key Stage 4, was insufficient. Progress on the implementation of the new EDP since April 2002 has also been highly satisfactory overall. All priorities are being implemented, though some are more advanced than others. For example, good progress has been made in the priority related to raising attainment in the early years and in primary education, especially literacy and numeracy; similar progress has also been made in raising standards in Key Stage 3 and in support for schools causing concern. There has been less progress to date on the priority related to narrowing the attainment gap.

28. Lead officers continue to monitor regularly the progress of activities and their work will contribute to the first review of the plan this autumn and a formal evaluation in March 2003. Evaluation arrangements are appropriate and will include small, focused groups, accountable to an EDP review board, yet to be constituted, made up representatives from a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

29. The Excellence in Cities initiative, which commenced in September 2000, started too slowly with little central co-ordination and insufficient collaboration between the groups of secondary headteachers that manage the development of

each strand. There are weaknesses in the original action plan, which has now reached the end of its shelf-life, with some targets insufficiently precise. A revised plan is to be introduced by the end of this year. Progress has improved following the appointment of an Excellence in Cities co-ordinator in July 2001. She has secured a much-needed injection of support for strategic leadership and accountability. Although 65 learning mentors have been appointed and learning support units set up in 11 secondary schools, there is little evidence of impact, partly due to the lack of a systematic approach to data collection to evaluate their effectiveness. The commitment and accountability of secondary schools to the initiative has been weak overall due to a lack of collaboration between them. Moreover, they have not been held to account for the funding they have received, which has undermined the initiative's potential to drive improvement.

### **The allocation of resources to priorities**

30. As at the previous inspection, the allocation of resources to priorities is highly satisfactory with few weaknesses. The council has backed its stated priority for education with a commitment to continue to spend at SSA and with a substantial capital programme to tackle previous under-investment in school buildings. The importance the council places on the education of under fives is reflected in its commitment to spend above SSA in this area.

31. The distribution of funding through the formula rightly reflects local circumstances with factors for high pupil turnover and support for schools with high average salaries. An explicit council commitment to improving standards in the primary phase means that the funding formula is more generous to primary schools than in most LEAs. A factor using ward-level multiple deprivation indices was introduced for secondary schools in 2002/2003 to target resources more clearly on schools where social deprivation impacts on standards.

32. Learning services has a good record of financial management, although this is not the case for the council as a whole. The director has appropriate discretion to redirect savings within the cash limited budget. Budget 'hotspots' are identified early and small amounts of underspend in the non-delegated budget have been carried forward. Planned expenditure in 2002/2003 of £44 per pupil on central administration is less than the averages for unitary authorities (£50) and England (£48) and well within the target figure of £60 per pupil set by the Secretary of State for LEAs outside London.

33. Consultation on the budget and the funding formula was improved for the 2002/2003 allocations and is now good. A representative group of headteachers was influential in helping to simplify the formula and identify further areas for delegation, including the cost of the special educational needs support service, in order to achieve the 87 per cent delegation target. For the first time, a separate consultation meeting was held for governors and a helpful explanatory booklet was circulated afterwards for those unable to attend.

34. School finances are appropriately monitored through regular reports and three-year budget projections. Link advisers and officers from the finance and personnel teams work effectively together and share information about schools

causing concern. An increase in school surpluses, beginning at the time of the previous inspection, was successfully reversed in 2001/2002 through concerted action, including joint visits to schools, a new loan scheme, and the brokering of a bulk purchase arrangement for significant one-off purchases. Although 45 per cent of primary schools continue to have surpluses in excess of five per cent, the number with very high balances, in excess of ten per cent, reduced from 21 to just six. The LEA has rightly identified a potential problem with an increase in the number of schools in deficit, albeit by small amounts, and is taking appropriate early steps to reverse this trend.

35. Support for schools in bidding for external grants is weak, although schools themselves have been successful in securing a range of funds, including the sponsorship needed for specialist school status.

36. The high and increasing level of central recharges was a concern at the time of the previous inspection and remains so. District Audit and, more recently, the corporate governance inspection have also highlighted the issue. In many cases, charges are neither predictable nor transparent. Belatedly, work is now in hand at the corporate level to develop formal service level agreements, which will allow individual directorates to determine the volume and hence the cost of the support they need, and to monitor its quality.

### **Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value**

37. Structures for the implementation of Best Value are unsatisfactory with strengths within education outweighed by weaknesses in the corporate arrangements. The most recent Best Value Performance Plan received an unqualified audit opinion, although there were several recommendations in the area of performance management. The District Auditor reports that Best Value is not yet fully integrated into the way the council works and has not been convinced of members' commitment to the process in the past. A number of changes are being made to corporate arrangements following the appointment of new staff and the example set within learning services. Future Best Value reviews will have a clear role for members and be led by an officer from outside the service under review.

38. Within learning services, an effective performance management system, which ties personal performance targets directly to objectives in service plans, is in place. Plans include targets for continuous improvement. Performance is measured against key objectives and is reviewed by the senior management team each quarter.

39. A review of school meals, inspected as part of the corporate governance inspection, demonstrated an inappropriate presumption towards in-house provision. Early Best Value reviews of educational psychology and the education welfare service are being revisited because of a lack of challenge at the time they were conducted.

40. No completed Best Value reviews were presented for formal inspection by the Ofsted team. A review of services to support schools in raising standards was nearing completion at the time of the inspection. The review had benefited from the

involvement of external consultants. Although the review was limited in its challenge - it concluded that the LEA needed to maintain the scope of its services due to the immaturity of the market - there was a genuine attempt at challenge and a willingness to consider alternative strategies. It was too soon to detect any impact of this review as the action plan had only just been published.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **The effectiveness of services to support school improvement**

41. The previous inspection judged that the quality assurance group provided high quality advisory support to schools and was a well-managed service. Recommendations to cease the regular review of schools and to give greater attention to using other means of early identification of weaknesses have been addressed. At the previous inspection, the expertise of staff was good, and the effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement were considered to be highly satisfactory. They remain so, and have not been subject to fieldwork in this inspection. Since 1999, the quality assurance group has expanded in order to implement national strategies and has improved its effectiveness in most of the services it provides. The LEA has an impressive record of turning round schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses and its approach to intervention is robust. Support for the early years is good. Management support services vary in quality. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory, and that for curriculum ICT, behaviour and minority ethnic and Traveller support poor. Overall, however, services are appropriately focused on school improvement and the strategic planning of services to support this is satisfactory. The quality assurance group continues to be well led and there are good management structures in place for delivering advisory and consultancy services to schools. In most cases, quality assurance group staff are appropriately deployed, although action has not been taken - despite the acknowledged need - to resolve the inadequacy of support for ICT in the curriculum. Performance management arrangements are satisfactory. The LEA's knowledge of its schools is good.

42. Senior officers have a clear commitment to raising standards and improving school effectiveness through improved service delivery. A Best Value review of services to support schools in raising standards, completed recently, was wide in its scope and has resulted in some realignment of resources and delegation to schools.

### **Monitoring, challenge and intervention**

43. The LEA has clearly set out its definitions for monitoring, challenge and intervention in its recently published document *A Strategy for Securing School Improvement*. Procedures overall are highly satisfactory. The document details succinctly, yet comprehensively, how the LEA will monitor school performance using data and school visits and how this leads to the categorisation of schools according to effectiveness. It describes clearly the criteria for intervention and how the LEA will support schools to improve if intervention is required. Challenge is provided both through the target-setting process and through link advisers' work with schools on the outcomes of their self-evaluation.

44. Headteachers and governors have been fully consulted on the LEA's strategy that reflects the code of practice for LEA-school relationships and states the council's commitment to promoting school autonomy and adopting the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success. However, visits to schools and focus group discussions revealed that a small minority of headteachers is still unclear about the implications of the strategy. Moreover, despite the efforts of the LEA to publicise

their respective roles and responsibilities, not all schools have yet achieved the autonomy to which they themselves aspire and a number are over-reliant on adviser visits.

### **The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools**

45. The previous inspection judged the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools to be satisfactory. Since then, significant improvements have been made, although the LEA's overall effectiveness remains satisfactory because there are areas where further improvement is still needed.

46. The monitoring of schools is now suitably differentiated. Link advisers make good use of performance data together with a school's own self-evaluation to agree its effectiveness. All schools are now placed in one of five bands<sup>7</sup>, which are used appropriately to allocate core support to schools. Criteria for placing schools in bands, the frequency and purpose of monitoring visits, and 'triggers' for moving between bands are clearly stated. The LEA monitors the outcomes of school visits rigorously and senior officers meet regularly to determine the progress of schools. As such, it is a flexible system with some movement between bands based on termly reviews. There are, however, a number of weaknesses. Despite thorough consultation, a minority of schools do not know which band they are in and are unclear about their entitlement to monitoring and support. Moreover, a large majority of the LEA's schools are currently in band one, pending a review following the 2002 examination results. This large allocation of schools to band one sits uneasily with the depressed attainment profile of many of them and the high proportion of secondary schools, in particular, that compare unfavourably with schools in similar circumstances.

47. Schools are able to purchase additional support from advisers and consultants via a service level agreement. Nearly all schools have bought into this service.

#### **Recommendation**

##### **In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenging schools the LEA should:**

- adjust the categorisation of schools to ensure a more realistic profile of school effectiveness and ensure that every school is clear about its categorisation and entitlement to monitoring and support.

48. The provision of attainment data is satisfactory. Schools are provided with data, based on individual pupils' progress, to support the target-setting process. This enables the LEA to predict attainment for pupil cohorts and, acknowledging contextual factors, to have a robust debate with schools. While an acceptable range of benchmark data is issued and includes some data on target groups at individual

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<sup>7</sup> All schools are placed in one of five categories with band one being for the most effective. These schools receive two days of core support per year. Band five is reserved for schools requiring special measures or where formal warning or intervention by the LEA is warranted.



school level, it does not include sufficient information about those at risk of social exclusion. This inhibits schools' effective use of comparative data. However, schools rate the support, training and guidance they receive as good. They acknowledge that the LEA knows its schools well and is able to target support and intervene appropriately.

49. The LEA focuses support well on those schools with the greatest need, although insufficient progress is being made by those schools that are under-performing who still require more targeted support. The increasingly effective use of data by advisers in target setting with schools is mostly realistic and challenging. However, this work is less effective in a minority of secondary schools who lack commitment to the process or deny underachievement. Overall though, most schools feel challenged, particularly in relation to target setting. The LEA's framework for school self-evaluation is good and emphasised appropriately by link advisers. The LEA acknowledges that there now needs to be an emphasis on securing progress in pupils' attainment rather than merely setting targets.

50. Raising standards and improving the effectiveness of secondary schools poses the LEA a continuing challenge. The performance of all but three secondary schools in 2001 was below that of similar schools and in the case of two-thirds, well below similar schools. Permanent exclusions are increasing, fixed term exclusions are high and attendance in 2001/2002 was the fifth worst in the country. The LEA is challenging a culture of low expectations that schools have been slow to address. Schools have also been slow to embrace national initiatives. The Excellence in Cities initiative started badly, with a focus on resources rather than the development of effective strategies to achieve targets, and it has taken time for headteachers to support actively the Key Stage 3 strategy and work with gifted and talented pupils. There is little collaboration between secondary schools and, in general, with both primary schools and post-16 institutions. Secondary headteachers' meetings are not used as a forum to promote discussion and collaboration with partners or contribute to the formulation of policy with LEA officers, who despite offers to attend these meetings, have not been invited and do not receive either agendas or minutes of meetings. The DfES has rightly identified the need to support the LEA and its schools in developing effective strategies to raise pupils' attainment. It has, therefore, in consultation with learning services, initiated, with EiC funding, a pathfinder project to draw together strategic secondary school improvement initiatives into a coherent plan to raise standards. As a consequence, secondary heads are now developing collaborative arrangements to raise standards.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to engage secondary headteachers effectively in raising attainment:**

- agree with them a set of actions to improve partnership working with the LEA, primary schools and post-16 institutions; and
- reinforce the council's expectations of headteachers in raising standards and developing inclusive schools that are responsive to the needs of the local community and the city as a whole.

## **The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools**

51. The LEA has maintained its robust approach towards schools who require special measures or have serious weaknesses. As previously, the LEA has achieved a good balance of support and intervention. There is now only one primary school deemed to require special measures, one with serious weaknesses and one underachieving. This is in stark contrast to the situation in 1999 when a fifth of all schools were in one of these three categories. The LEA has identified a further five schools causing concern, based on its own monitoring procedures.

52. The LEA's intervention and support for schools in special measures and those with serious weaknesses is good. The LEA provides well-planned, differentiated and co-ordinated support and has, when necessary, used its formal powers to withdraw delegation and appoint additional governors. Action plans contain sound exit strategies to support the school once it has made sufficient progress. In one primary school requiring special measures, the LEA took decisive action, following a monitoring visit by HMI, to improve the school's leadership and management, which led to rapid and sustainable progress. This action, together with a sensitive and well-focused action plan, contributed to the school's success in being removed from this designation within twelve months.

53. However, the LEA has not been sufficiently robust in its efforts to raise standards in under-performing schools, particularly in the secondary sector where half are under-performing at Key Stage 3 and all but three achieved GCSE results in 2001 below those of similar schools.

54. School visit reports by advisers and consultants are thorough and evaluative and, on the whole, helpful to schools. They acknowledge successes and state recommendation for future action. However, a few instances were found of an accurate analysis by link advisers of areas of weakness in schools, but inadequate follow-up to ensure that the advice provided had been appropriately acted upon. The reports are scrutinised by senior officers who regularly monitor the overall progress of schools and report to elected members.

## **Support for literacy**

55. As found in the previous inspection, support for raising standards in literacy is highly satisfactory. The recommendation to provide schools with guidance on ways they can build on previous initiatives has been successfully completed through courses and guidance.

56. Satisfactory progress has been made in raising standards in literacy, but, despite this, overall standards remain unsatisfactory. In 2001, standards were well below national averages at Key Stage 2 and below at Key Stage 1. Standards are improving faster than the national rate at both key stages. Pupils in the Education Action Zone have been very successful; they have attained the national average at Key Stage 1, and at Key Stage 2; results have risen by 20 per cent. Overall, provisional results for 2002 indicate that the LEA's target for Key Stage 1 has been reached, but, at Key Stage 2, results are well below the target.

57. Support from the LEA has enabled most schools to make steady progress. Schools rate this support highly. To date 39 schools with low standards have been identified, appropriately, for intensive support. A well-planned programme is agreed with these schools, based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the impact monitored. Good use is made of data to target pupils not making the expected progress. However, even with this level of intensive support, eight out of 17 schools did not reach their Key Stage 2 target in 2002, two because of severe staffing difficulties.

58. Training has covered some issues well, such as the under-achievement of boys, but others have received insufficient attention. Teaching assistants have had good training to support pupils with learning difficulties and looked after children. Until recently, support for pupils with English as an additional language received insufficient attention and support for the use of ICT to raise standards in literacy is unsatisfactory. There are suitable networks for sharing good practice, including termly meetings for literacy co-ordinators and an annual conference. Early years teachers from the Education Action Zone meet together and a Beacon school for writing hosts visits for teachers from other schools. Leading literacy teachers contribute effectively to improvement through demonstration lessons, and the provision of advice and training.

59. Consultants are well managed, well trained and perceived as experts by teachers. They liaise effectively with the Education Action Zone director and share training programmes. The LEA is well placed to improve its literacy provision further through its involvement in a national pilot focused on schools where standards have levelled off, and in its work to support pupils who move school frequently.

### **Support for numeracy**

60. Support for numeracy is now good, having been found to be satisfactory in the previous inspection. At that time, the National Numeracy Strategy was not being implemented consistently, although there were signs of improvement.

61. Good progress has been made in raising standards. Standards are improving in line with the national rate at Key Stage 1 and at four times the national rate at Key Stage 2. Pupils in the Education Action Zone have improved at a faster rate than in other schools. In 2001, standards at Key Stage 1 were only four per cent behind the national average and two per cent behind at Key Stage 2. Provisional results for 2002 indicate that the target for Key Stage 1 has been reached, but the target for Key Stage 2 has been missed by approximately six per cent.

62. The National Numeracy Strategy is well understood by schools and is having a positive impact on teaching and standards. Over the last three years, all primary schools have received intensive support for numeracy for at least one year, 14 schools for longer. In 2002, provisional figures indicate that even with this level of intensive support, 22 of the 42 schools receiving support did not reach their target. Consultants negotiate with schools a detailed programme of support based on a joint evaluation of standards and provision. Numeracy co-ordinators are well supported through termly meetings and an annual conference. Leading numeracy teachers

make a valuable contribution to improvement through demonstration lessons and training sessions.

63. Numeracy consultants are highly rated by schools for their contribution to improving teaching and raising standards. Links between the LEA and the Education Action Zone are good. The involvement of the LEA in a pilot to raise standards further in under-attaining schools is well timed to build on improvements.

### **Support for information and communication technology (ICT)**

64. Support to schools in the use of ICT throughout the curriculum to raise standards was not evaluated at the previous inspection. The quality and level of support currently offered to schools is poor.

65. There is a lack of effective strategic management of ICT both at a corporate level<sup>8</sup> and also within learning services. A newly published corporate IT strategy concentrates on equipment provision and there is no linkage between that and the LEA's recently published strategy for ICT, which also fails to focus on the use of ICT to raise standards of attainment. Moreover, actions are too general, not costed and not sufficiently linked to other ICT developments in the city learning centres and Education Action Zone. Little action has been taken to tackle the shortcomings identified by HMI during a visit to evaluate ICT provision in spring 2001. Nevertheless, an ICT strategy group has been set up recently to co-ordinate developments within the LEA.

66. There is inadequate support for the development of ICT in the curriculum. Staffing levels are insufficient to meet the needs of schools. Two consultants, who had previously undertaken some effective work in primary schools, have had their responsibilities extended to include Key Stage 3 work; the ICT adviser has other significant responsibilities. In EDP2, there are very challenging individual school targets for attainment in ICT at the end of Key Stage 3; however, strategies to achieve these targets are unclear, not least because the ICT adviser and consultants were unaware of them. Primary school headteachers have received some training on moderating pupils' work as have the small number who have attended LEA-run courses. However, there has been no cross-phase moderation. Training courses offered to schools are very limited, take-up is poor and only one-third of schools have used the advisory service since January 2001. Only 23 per cent of teachers have completed their New Opportunities Fund ICT training; this is unsatisfactory.

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<sup>8</sup> See Audit Commission *Kingston upon Hull City Council Corporate Governance inspection June 2002*

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the strategic management of ICT and its use to raise standards:**

- review the capacity of the LEA to provide schools with the expertise they need to use ICT effectively in the classroom; and
- provide training for all ICT co-ordinators on the levelling of pupils' ICT work and put in place opportunities for schools to undertake cross-phase moderation.

67. A small number of primary schools, whose Ofsted reports have highlighted deficiencies in ICT provision, have received useful support that has enabled them to make progress. However, the strategy for identifying schools requiring ICT support is not sufficiently rigorous. A failure to engage ICT co-ordinators is reflected in the very poor turnout at termly co-ordinators' meetings.

68. Advisor support to secondary schools has focused on the delivery of dedicated ICT lessons as requested by schools, through their service level agreement. The LEA does not know which schools are not meeting statutory requirements for the delivery of ICT at Key Stage 4. The two recently opened city learning centres have a clear brief to support schools in the development of ICT within the curriculum and have already provided courses for gifted and talented pupils and for those attending the modern language summer school.

69. The allocation of National Grid for Learning resources has been well planned and implemented with all but two schools meeting their computer : pupil target ratios this year. However, schools are very dissatisfied with the quality and availability of technical support. Consequently, Education Action Zone schools have engaged their own technicians who provide a higher quality service than that available from the LEA.

70. The Education Action Zone has a strong ICT focus and its 17 schools are very well supported. Several projects have contributed to the effective development of ICT across the curriculum. Seven schools have trialled on-line curriculum materials; on-the-job training has been provided to every school in the use of interactive whiteboards, the purchase of which has been subsidised by the Education Action Zone, and an updated ICT for life skills course has been piloted. Based on the national guidance for ICT, this course will encourage the assessment of pupils' work, although ICT-literate pupils would be unlikely to find the content sufficiently challenging. There are no effective channels for the ICT work undertaken in the Education Action Zone schools to be disseminated more widely.

## **Recommendation**

### **In order to improve standards through the use of ICT in the classroom:**

- extend the dissemination of good practice across schools.

## **Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3**

71. This function was not inspected previously. However, raising standards in literacy at Key Stage 3 was the subject of a recommendation in the 1999 inspection. This has been addressed and support is satisfactory. Although standards remain stubbornly low in the core subjects and results have fallen short of the LEA's targets, satisfactory progress has been made from a low base. The rate of improvement in English in Key Stage 3 tests, as well as in mathematics, has exceeded the national rate over the last three years. The improvement in attendance has been too little and there has been a worrying increase in exclusions in the last year.

72. The LEA's comprehensive and well-articulated strategy takes good account of the national strategy as well as local factors, including the need to improve parental involvement and to increase the number of pupils reaching higher levels of attainment. Implementation of a phased introduction to the strategy is effective with sound leadership from the LEA. The work of the experienced and credible consultants has been well received by schools and is beginning to make an impact, helped by an increasing commitment from schools' senior managers. Cross-curricular work is under-developed.

73. Intervention is based on an accurate analysis of need and focuses appropriately on improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Although all schools will receive intensive support over the first two years of the strategy, this is suitably differentiated, in both quantity and nature. Training is of good quality and is responsive to the needs of individual schools.

74. Ensuring pupils maintain progress from primary to secondary school remains a significant challenge. Pupils of all abilities fail to make the expected progress between Years 7 and 9. Secondary schools have been slow to grasp the significance of this. The LEA rightly sees this as a key priority. There are strong links with the national strategies for literacy and numeracy, with consultants working across the phases and providing cohesion in training. The LEA has promoted a number of well-conceived curriculum initiatives between primary and secondary schools, one involving the Education Action Zone, but the impact is not yet evident. Although there is emerging good practice in a few schools, the analysis and use of data by schools is not yet good enough to provide the right level of challenge for pupils of different abilities, or to target the needs of specific groups of pupils.

75. The LEA's strategy for spreading good practice is developing slowly, with the involvement of advanced skills teachers and leading departments. The strategy team works effectively with link advisers to assess the impact of the team's work and to measure progress. Working links with the ethnic minority support service and the special educational needs support service are underdeveloped and constrain the ability of the team to tackle underachievement.

### **Support for minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers**

76. The inspection of this function previously was limited to a review of the bilingual support service. Support for this function is now poor. Very limited progress has been made in the last three years, despite the fact that the minority ethnic population has become increasingly diverse and the needs of schools and pupils have grown. The city has become home to asylum seekers in the past two

years and the 728 minority ethnic pupils attend three-quarters of the LEA's schools. The LEA has been slow to recognise the implications of this for schools and does not have an up-to-date policy for bilingualism.

77. The LEA's strategy is piecemeal and reactive. Plans lack coherence and cohesion. The work of the ethnic minority support service and the Traveller education service is not closely integrated with the work of the quality assurance group in raising attainment; collaborative working is minimal. There has been significant improvement in data collection and analysis by LEA officers, but this has not been disseminated to schools or translated effectively into strategies for improvement involving the two services. A comprehensive self-evaluation schedule for promoting race equality in raising achievement, to be issued to schools, was not developed in consultation with the ethnic minority support service, whose involvement in monitoring the use of delegated monies is unclear. Schools have received no curriculum guidance and there has been minimal training for senior managers, teachers, support staff and governors.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils:**

- ensure that the work of the ethnic minority support service is an integral part of school improvement; and
- develop curriculum guidance and provide training for schools.

78. Two years ago, a review of the bilingual support service identified the need to develop a more defined consultancy and training role. Although the service was renamed to reflect a broader role, insufficient progress has been made in addressing the recommendation. The service continues to function almost exclusively as a bilingual support service, concentrating principally on initial assessment and providing support to pupils at an early stage of language acquisition. This aspect of its work continues to be well received by schools, although their overall evaluation of the service has declined markedly since the previous inspection as the service has not adjusted to meet schools' needs.

79. The quality of service planning is poor. There is no single service plan for the ethnic minority support service and although several plans exist side-by-side, key personnel have not been sufficiently involved in their formulation. This inhibits the ethnic minority support service from prioritising its work or developing professionally. The Best Value review highlighted the need for better consultation and communication, benchmarking and for the service to widen its remit. However, the action plan does not tackle all the issues comprehensively and lacks sharp success criteria.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to develop an ethnic minority support service that has the capacity to meet the changing needs of schools:**

- implement a service plan that identifies and prioritises service objectives clearly;

and

- evaluate the capacity of the service to meet new objectives and implement a professional development programme to address needs.

80. Good collaboration between social services and education has enabled asylum seekers to be admitted quickly and smoothly into schools. Schools have been supported by clear and comprehensive guidance. However, the delay in providing a translation and interpretation service has left many pupils and their parents unsupported on transition to secondary schools.

81. The LEA belongs to a small consortium for the education of Traveller children. The service is delivered through a formal joint arrangement with two other LEAs with a neighbouring authority as the lead. Under a new manager, the work of the Traveller education service has improved significantly in the past eighteen months, although there is still much work to do in raising attainment and meeting the needs of Travellers on unauthorised sites. The LEA is providing no education at present for these pupils, many of whom stop only briefly by the side of the road as the council has limited authorised sites. The service has worked hard to identify and reach other Travellers, but recognises that it needs to do more to identify and support house-Traveller families.

### **Support for gifted and talented pupils**

82. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory, although marked progress has been made recently. The LEA got off to a very slow start and too many potentially able pupils fail to make progress. This shortcoming is now being addressed coherently across all phases of education through initiatives detailed in the EDP, the Education Action Zone and the Excellence in Cities strand for gifted and talented pupils. A start has also been made through excellence challenge to address the needs of able pupils post-16 and to encourage the wider participation in extension activities by pre-16 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

83. Although progress is very variable across schools and phases, there is considerable momentum in those schools that have grasped the significance of the strategy's potential. Despite the hard work and drive of the Excellence in Cities gifted and talented co-ordinator, there has been uneven commitment from secondary schools. Schools have not, until very recently, been held to account for the use of targeted funds. Planned collaboration between the Excellence in Cities and the LEA in monitoring provision has the potential to inject the necessary challenge.

84. Cohorts have been identified and co-ordinators appointed in all secondary schools, although not all have completed their training. Target setting has not been sharp enough and the progress and attainment of cohorts of pupils has not been monitored, making it impossible to evaluate the impact of different initiatives and focus on those pupils most in need. Although there is scope for wider brokerage arrangements, there is a developing range of extension and enrichment initiatives and activities for pupils. Achievers in excellence, a scheme to raise aspirations of over 1000 Year 8 pupils, has been successful, and has been extended into Year 9. Learning mentors are being used to good effect to provide encouragement and support to underachieving able pupils. Two summer schools that ran last year were



deemed successful, but there was limited evaluation of their impact. The use of ICT is under-developed, as is the range of enrichment activities for talented pupils. Dissemination of good practice has barely begun and there is no evidence of impact to date.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve levels of attainment of gifted and talented pupils:**

- target provision and support on the identified needs of specific cohorts of pupils.

85. Work in primary schools is gaining momentum. The strategy is well led by a recently appointed primary adviser, who is working closely with the Excellence in Cities strand co-ordinator to address transition issues between primary and secondary phases. Comprehensive draft guidance has been developed in consultation with primary schools. Good progress has been made in initiating a small schools able project and in identifying good practice. There are opportunities for primary and secondary pupils to work together, although this is inconsistent across the LEA.

### **Support for school management**

86. Support for school leadership and management was satisfactory at the previous inspection and remains so overall, but with some important weaknesses. The proportion of schools judged by Ofsted as well or very well managed has improved in both primary and secondary schools. Although the percentage of primary schools that are good or very good is broadly in line with the national average, the proportion of secondary schools judged similarly, is well below the national average.

87. The LEA promotes the national leadership and management programmes appropriately and complements them with a satisfactory range of training opportunities for experienced and aspiring managers. Courses and conferences led by the LEA are well attended and effective partnership work with Hull University leads to accredited qualifications for school-based staff. Training and support for middle managers are satisfactory overall. The LEA has recently entered into a partnership contract with an external consultant, which primarily focuses on leadership for learning in secondary schools as a contribution to the strategy for school improvement.

88. The LEA has published good guidance to schools on self-evaluation. This material is phase-specific and well focused. In addition, the Ofsted training model on self-evaluation has been well received. Visits by link advisers place an appropriate emphasis on self-evaluation. However, there was significant variability in headteachers' commitment to the scheme and the robust use of the material.

89. The induction and mentoring arrangements for newly appointed senior managers is variable and has led to some dissatisfaction with provision. The training and development provided is not based on a systematic analysis of needs.

90. Support to schools in adopting the principles of Best Value is satisfactory, although at an early stage of development. General advice and guidance has been issued, but is not yet fully embedded in practice. Schools are not provided with impartial advice about the procurement of services from alternative sources, although a corporate procurement strategy was prepared in October 2001. A decision on this is still awaited. However, the LEA is more vigilant than most in its guidance and monitoring of Best Value in schools. Schools are required to describe in an annual return, for each area of the budget, the steps they have taken to secure Best Value. The LEA currently evaluates each return and provides helpful feedback.

**Recommendation:**

**In order to improve school autonomy:**

- provide guidance on the procurement of services beyond those of the council so that schools can make informed choices.

**Support to governors**

91. During the previous inspection, support for governors was very good. The LEA has failed to keep pace with expected improvements and the support is now highly satisfactory.

92. The LEA continues to provide good quality support for governors. However, the cost of the service is high and the undifferentiated service level agreement leaves schools with insufficient purchase options. From April 2002, further funding was devolved; all but one school buys back the service, which includes clerking, training and support. The clerking service is of a high standard. Induction training is effective and enables new governors to understand quickly their role and participate effectively in governance. Training sessions, which can be delivered on the school site, are helpful and well tailored to governors' needs. The governors' forum provides an opportunity for consultation.

93. The strategic role of governors is under-developed. The LEA recognises this and has recently published useful guidance material to complement planned training courses. One effective approach to developing governors' strategic role is taking place in the Education Action Zone where EAZ officers have been co-opted onto the governing bodies of schools in the zone.

94. There is no policy on governor recruitment. However, the LEA is aware of the need to monitor the ethnic composition of governing bodies and is devising strategies to make them more representative of the school population. Targets for recruiting LEA and parent governors have been met. Good strategies have been devised to recruit governors through public and private companies, although targets for co-opted governors have not been met.

95. Governors receive helpful support in the recruitment and appointment of headteachers and deputies and link advisers provide good advice in the preparation of post-inspection action plans. Although chairs of governors attend target-setting meetings with their headteacher and link adviser, they do not receive advisers' notes of visits directly from the LEA, but inconsistently from headteachers. This inhibits their ability to monitor their school's progress.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to enhance the strategic management role of governors:**

- ensure that all records of visits are sent directly to chairs of governors.

96. The LEA provides good support to governing bodies that have been identified as weak and has helped, for instance, in the re-organisation of a governing body's committee structure to enable it to become more effective.

97. Good efforts have been made to improve communications between governors, schools and the LEA. The website has useful material, which enables governors to book courses on-line, download information and communicate electronically with officers.

### **Early years**

98. There are good partnership arrangements for supporting maintained and non-maintained sector settings for pupils under five. Central to the success of the partnership is the care taken to collaborate closely on strategy and policy by the officer and adviser with these responsibilities. There are effective links between strategic plans, for example, between the EDP and the Early Years and Childcare Development Plan. Actions arise from a clear audit of provision and, as such, are well targeted and appropriate. Good progress is being made and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are secure. There is now progress towards common admission arrangements for nursery and reception classes across all schools.

99. Support for early years practitioners is good; this includes a website for the dissemination of good practice, access to advanced skill teachers for the early years and a sound range of professional development opportunities.

100. The partnership has been successful in targeting support to enable vulnerable children to access early years provision. While the various funding streams can create administrative difficulties, the lead officer has been able to skilfully deploy financial resources to priorities and a great deal is achieved on a modest budget due to goodwill and collaboration. The partnership board has an appropriately wide membership, including elected members, and has an independent chairman. Smaller committee groups are responsible for implementing actions within plans and report quarterly on progress. The lead officer has reported on progress to the council's scrutiny committee. The partnership is committed to quality provision for all children, irrespective of setting and provision is good overall.

## **The effectiveness of services to support school management**

101. The variable quality and value for money of management services reported at the time of the previous inspection continues. Support overall is satisfactory. The 2002/2003 arrangements for buying back management services are well co-ordinated and provide a satisfactory infrastructure for schools. However, specifications are insufficiently precise; some services such as finance and ICT offer a menu of well differentiated support, the majority offer too little choice. The previous inspection criticised the LEA for not providing enough advice about alternative providers and that remains the case. Specifications do not make clear what services would continue to be provided if a school chooses not to buy back and are insufficiently detailed to help a school seek quotations from elsewhere. Client support for purchasing external services is too limited and is not offered as a service for schools.

102. There is a comprehensive annual satisfaction survey, the results of which are reviewed by headteachers' representatives and passed to service managers for action. Services have responded to schools' concerns. Apart from ICT technical support (which has since come under new management), all the services included in the 1999 school survey have improved.

103. **Financial services** are highly satisfactory with a number of strengths. The schools finance team provides knowledgeable and customer-focused advice on budget setting and planning, together with support to maintain and develop schools' financial management systems. Although specifications are expressed in general terms, the very high buy-back rate means that schools receive a seamless service covering both delegated and non-delegated functions. A flexible and well-regarded peripatetic bursar service is available for schools wishing to top up the work of their own administrative staff. The quality of financial support and advice was rated in the top quartile of LEAs in the school survey. Service managers within the LEA also receive good financial support.

104. Schools budget information is clearly presented. A versatile three-year budget planning tool and advance information about the impact of formula changes means that schools are adequately prepared before final allocations, including Standards Fund, are published in early March.

105. Finance officers publish data that allows schools to compare patterns of expenditure with similar schools. Training and support materials are also provided to raise competence and confidence at school level. The council has been slow to update the central accounting system so there is heavy reliance on monthly print-outs for monitoring purposes.

106. **Personnel services** are highly satisfactory. All schools buy back the professional advice and casework service. The specification for the recruitment and selection service is very clear and is a model which other services could follow. Information, usually in the form of letters to headteachers, is clear and up-to-date.

107. The service plan is clear and there is an enthusiasm for service improvement and development. An externally-led Best Value review of corporate support services identified weaknesses in corporate human resource policies. These are starting to be addressed. A working party of headteachers is appropriately engaged in the implementation, at school level, of a council-wide job evaluation exercise to harmonise terms and conditions for non-teaching staff. The service's healthy, outward-looking approach is demonstrated through its work in exploring a possible partnership with private companies for sickness monitoring and for a supply teacher agency. The provision of comparative information is currently confined to data on sickness levels.

108. Governors in schools subject to closure and the temporary governing bodies of new schools have been well supported. There have been few employment tribunals and all of them found in favour of the council. Relations with trades unions are good.

109. All schools use the council's **payroll service**, which the majority rated as good or very good in the school survey.

110. **Property services** provided by the direct service organisation were poorly rated at the time of the previous inspection and remain unsatisfactory. There is too much variation in the quality of support and the service specification does not make clear what schools should receive for their subscription. The large majority of secondary schools regard the service as poor or very poor. Although individual surveyors know their schools well, published guidance on premises matters is limited. Enhancements to staffing and computerised ordering systems were introduced in summer 2002 in response to customer feedback, but have yet to impact.

111. Support for **ICT in school administration** is unsatisfactory, although some aspects are improving. Weaknesses in technical support for school systems, due partly to staff turnover, have been addressed through a restructuring of the peripatetic technician service. However, electronic transfer of data and web developments are hampered by an out-dated corporate infrastructure and an insecure overall strategy. Shortcomings at the corporate level are being addressed through the corporate governance inspection action plan, although discussions about the involvement of a private sector partner are at an early stage.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve the electronic transfer of information:**

- ensure, during the updating of the corporate IT infra-structure, that the needs of learning services and schools are recognised and acted upon.

112. The service level agreement for schools includes a clear specification and a menu of options which is reviewed by a consultative group of headteachers. Appropriate further improvements are planned to tailor the service to the varying levels of ICT expertise in schools. Targets for response times to calls to the help desk are well monitored. Nevertheless, the quality of technical support for ICT was

rated in the bottom quartile of LEAs in the school survey; this represents a deterioration since the previous inspection. Concerns about the service included a slowness to respond to problems, a lack of confidence in the ability of staff to effect repairs and unwillingness by technicians to adopt a customer-focus to their work.

113. Basic e-mail communication between the LEA and schools is well established, but plans for the transfer of electronic data via an intranet for schools have been delayed by at least 18 months because of inadequacies in corporate IT systems. Pupil-level data and transfer information is handled using diskettes. The council's web site provides too little information on learning services for the public.

114. Facilities management services are provided by the direct service organisation which, understandably, does not see its role to offer client advice to schools seeking alternative providers. In the absence of corporate advice, schools are poorly served, although the LEA will broker advice from an external consultant on request. About two-thirds of schools use the in-house provider for **cleaning**. Specifications are individually tailored to schools' needs and the service is satisfactory with its customer focus borne out by schools' positive comments. In contrast, the **grounds maintenance service** is poor. Take-up by schools has fallen with less than half currently using the service. Specifications and contracts are vague with only limited contract monitoring.

115. A Best Value review of **catering** in schools received a critical report in the corporate governance inspection because of the presumption towards the in-house provider and political pressure to halt the tendering process. Despite these weaknesses, changes following the review have led to improvements and the service is now satisfactory with some strengths. Costs have been reduced, targets for higher meals take-up have been set and exceeded, and customer satisfaction increased. The school meals service rightly recognises its contribution to raising standards through, for example, the installation in some secondary schools of fast-food style outlets to encourage pupils to stay on the premises at lunchtime and so improve afternoon attendance.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve school autonomy:**

- make available access to client advice for schools wishing to explore alternative providers for facilities management services.

### **The LEA's work to assure the supply and quality of teachers**

116. Support for the recruitment and retention of teachers was not previously inspected. Against a background of a growing shortage of teachers, the LEA is now working satisfactorily to assure the supply and quality of teachers; this features as a priority in EPD2.

117. The LEA has conducted an audit of the teaching force and has rightly identified serious short- and long-term problems with teacher supply as well as a shortage of teachers from minority ethnic groups and men. The LEA is finding it

difficult to recruit headteachers and experienced teachers and, over the next five years, is facing the prospect of a 50 per cent turnover of the teaching workforce through retirement. Vacancies, and the reasons for them, are monitored and analysed termly. The proportion of teachers absent through ill health has risen and, at almost six per cent, is comparatively high. Schools report problems with finding supply teachers to cover for staff absence through illness despite an on-line supply list.

118. Secondary schools have greater problems with recruiting teachers than primary schools. Only five of the 15 secondary schools had a full complement of teachers at the start of term and there are problems with the match of teacher and support staff expertise to the demands of the curriculum. Unqualified teachers account for nearly ten per cent of secondary school staff. About a quarter of them are on the graduate teacher programme.

119. The LEA is now taking appropriate steps to recruit newly qualified and experienced teachers, and graduates, but with little impact to date. A recruitment strategy manager, funded by the Teacher Training Agency, is well informed and has consulted schools on a recruitment strategy. One of the local universities provides a good range of professional development for teachers, including a university-accredited course for newly qualified teachers, whose numbers have increased this year. In 2002, 81 per cent of newly qualified teachers remained in the city's schools for a second year. Overall, the LEA has in place appropriate systems for identifying the training needs of teachers and meeting them. The LEA has rightly identified the need to recruit experienced teachers from outside the authority so has recently taken direct action.

120. Neither the LEA nor schools are realising the potential of ICT in a number of areas, including that for recruiting teachers. Only 16 of the LEA's 100 schools have web-sites, and one-third of these are out-of-date, as is a significant proportion of the information on the council's web-site.

## **SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

### **Introduction**

121. The previous inspection focused its evaluation of support for special educational needs on the effectiveness of the three main services contributing to SEN provision: the special needs support service, the education psychology service and the hearing impaired service. The LEA was satisfactory in its efforts to meet statutory obligations, support school improvement and achieve value for money. None of these areas have been subject to fieldwork in this inspection, although documentation has been provided to inform the judgements made.

### **Strategy**

122. The LEA's strategy for SEN was not inspected in 1999. However, since the previous inspection, significant developments have taken place in the formulation of the LEA's strategy for SEN, which is satisfactory. During 2001/2002, there was a major review of SEN provision designed to inform the production of the LEA's strategy and policy for SEN. Partners were adequately consulted. The review document outlined clearly the strengths of the authority and the challenges that had to be overcome. The resulting SEN policy, published in May 2002, is good. It is a clear, well-thought-out document that clearly articulates the LEA's values and principles in relation to SEN and inclusion, and explains the procedures and arrangements for meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils. The underlying thrust of the policy is to empower mainstream schools to meet the varying needs of pupils with SEN without resorting to time-consuming assessment and statementing procedures. Funding is delegated to schools to meet pupils' needs.

123. The LEA's strategy plan for *Meeting the Needs of Educationally Vulnerable Children in Kingston upon Hull* was published in June 2002. This plan, despite its title, has a clear focus on SEN and rightly identifies three key activities that underpin its work on inclusion. While this plan has precise targets and timescales, it is not always clear how these are to be achieved from the general actions given. Neither the cost of developments nor the post-holders responsible for delivering the actions are stated.

### **Statutory obligations**

124. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations in relation to SEN. This function has not been subject to fieldwork, although the inspection of data and documentation highlighted areas for improvement.

125. At the time of the previous inspection there had been a recent improvement in the time taken to produce a draft statement with 52 per cent of statements completed within the recommended 18-week period. In the last calendar year, 98 per cent of statements were prepared within 18 weeks, excluding recognised exceptions. This figure falls dramatically to only 38 per cent when exceptions are included; this is not acceptable. Of the 85 exceptions, 80 occurred because of a too slow response from the health authority and partners. Although some action has been taken to tackle this, it is insufficient.



## **Recommendation**

### **In order to improve the efficiency of assessments:**

- agree a plan with the local primary care trusts to tackle the causes of delay in the production of statements.

126. The LEA has appropriately contracted out its parent partnership service to an external organisation that also provides information and advice, support and advocacy to parents and carers. In the last two years there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals made to the external contractor, with new cases numbering around 70 per month. The same organisation is also responsible for the SEN mediation service. However, a significant number of appeals are made to the SEN tribunal. In the previous academic year, 40 appeals were upheld by the tribunal and 28 were withdrawn; both of these figures are unacceptable. As a result of concerns about this, a new post has been approved to work with the contractor to reduce appeals through early conciliation.

## **Recommendation**

### **In order to reduce the number of appeals made to the SEN tribunal:**

- agree with the external contractor a plan to significantly reduce the number of appeals.

127. The LEA has produced criteria for the banding of pupils with different types of special educational needs. Although the criteria are generally clear, some schools were uncertain about the criteria to be used to determine a pupil's readiness for statementing. The LEA's decision to delegate funding to schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties or specific learning difficulties is well understood and the majority of schools visited are supporting their pupils effectively.

## **School improvement**

128. This function has not been subject to fieldwork on this occasion; previously support for school improvement was satisfactory, it remains so.

129. The LEA has well-designed systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs. The LEA has been effective and proactive in developing a methodology for evaluating the impact of strategies to raise the attainment of SEN pupils. There are effective systems for collating the achievements of pupils with SEN and comparing them with those achieved by SEN pupils nationally.

130. Schools' SEN co-ordinators are well supported. They meet regularly and most have been issued with laptops to assist them to track pupils' progress. Usefully, three area special educational needs co-ordinators have recently been established to work with early education settings in the non-maintained sector.

131. There is a very high buy-back among schools for the special educational needs support service with all but ten schools purchasing the service level agreement that provides peripatetic support. Appropriately, the main focus of the 70 member-service is to support special educational needs co-ordinators in ensuring SEN pupils progress in mainstream schools. A recent Best Value review concluded that the service was efficient and of high quality.

### **Value for money**

132. No fieldwork was carried out for this function, which at the time of the previous inspection was satisfactory. It remains so. The amount delegated to schools for SEN, both for statemented and non-statemented pupils, is clearly communicated to schools and special educational needs co-ordinators are also informed. The total amount spent on SEN activities is comparatively high with the LEA the tenth highest spender on SEN out of the 45 unitary authorities; 17.4 per cent of the local schools budget was spent on SEN last year, compared with an average for unitary authorities of 15 per cent. Nevertheless, the amount spent on statements is low and there is, quite rightly, higher expenditure on non-statemented provision. The quality of provision is quite good with an appropriate emphasis on school improvement and raising standards. The LEA is effective at monitoring provision and the way in which delegated budgets are spent.

## **SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION**

### **The strategy to promote social inclusion**

133. The council has produced a *Social Inclusion Policy Framework*, which details six pledges aimed at promoting social inclusion. Although the public can access the council's progress on fulfilling its pledges through its website, the *Framework* lacks detail and specificity about intended actions. The council has been too slow to respond to race equality issues and the implications of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. There is inadequate provision for Travellers, both for those who are transient and for those who are Kingston upon Hull tenants. Although there is a multitude of initiatives to promote inclusion, they are not well co-ordinated and are not sufficiently broad enough to embrace the range of those socially excluded from the local society.

134. The council's *Framework* has, however, provided the basis for the LEA's worthy *Inclusion Policy Statement*, published in January 2002. However, there is little evidence, as yet, of the LEA delivering its commitments made therein. For example, the inspection team has found scant evidence of the LEA challenging schools to develop policies for inclusion or improve admission arrangements to assist inclusion. Nevertheless, the LEA has appointed an inclusion officer and has continued to develop an appropriate range of strategies to promote attendance at school. A sound foundation has been laid, much has yet to be delivered.

### **The supply of school places**

135. The large number of surplus places highlighted in the previous inspection, in successive District Audit reports and in the corporate governance inspection has been addressed, albeit belatedly. The situation is now satisfactory, but remains fragile.

136. Surplus places in primary schools reached a peak of nearly 20 per cent in 1999, one of the highest in the country. A reluctance by members to make difficult decisions on primary school closures caused a further two years of inaction. However, subsequent closures and changes in the method of calculating capacities had reduced the surplus to 12 per cent. Proposals are in hand which, if approved, will achieve by September 2003, the targets originally set following the previous inspection. Much of the reduction since 1999 has been achieved by seeking alternative council or community users for surplus accommodation rather than maximising the potential revenue savings of outright closure. This approach is not sustainable in the long-term.

137. An innovative approach has recently been used to identify surplus place reduction options for one of the declining housing areas in the city. An independent commission with a chair from outside the council took evidence from all interested parties. The commission's recommendations, including the closure of a school, were accepted by the cabinet and are now subject to formal consultation. The approach has helped to secure a political consensus.

138. The overall effect of recent reorganisations has contributed to school improvement. Standards were a cause for concern in all four of the primary schools that have been closed while seven more popular and successful schools have been expanded through effective use of the infant class size grant.

139. The decline in primary rolls is forecast to continue for the foreseeable future. Further closures or amalgamations will be required if the proportion of surplus places is not to increase again. However, planning is currently hindered by the absence of a strategy for reducing the council's housing stock<sup>9</sup>.

140. Targeted capital grants and the council's own resources from the sale of the telecommunications company have been used effectively to eliminate surplus places in secondary schools and enhance the quality of provision at the remaining schools. In the west of the city, a thorough, but long, consultation exercise led to the closure of three schools and the opening of two new establishments. Secondary rolls are forecast to rise slowly over the next five years so no further action is required.

141. The school organisation committee has worked effectively throughout the period of change, maintaining an appropriate independence from the LEA and reaching unanimity on all the proposals brought before it. The school organisation plan, on the other hand, is not a helpful planning tool. Although it complies with minimum requirements, it is silent on too many policy matters and does not highlight sufficiently clearly the issues, or geographical areas, where future action is likely to be required. There is, therefore, no broad local understanding of the reasons for change before options naming particular schools are brought forward.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to improve the management of school places:**

- strengthen the school organisation plan to provide a clear framework for future reorganisation proposals, linking the plan with the council's strategy for excess housing.

### **Admissions**

142. Admission arrangements are unsatisfactory overall, but have some strengths. Admissions to primary schools are managed effectively and the LEA is now beginning a consultation on a common admission date for primary schools. However, although the authority has already exceeded its target to provide sufficient places for those parents who want them, participation rates of three and four-year olds are too low. Although 92 per cent of first preferences are met at secondary transfer, appeals have increased and are now running at twice the national average. Information booklets for parents lack clarity. The LEA's transport policy and the council's fare subsidy for pupils travelling at peak times facilitate the operation of parental preference and help to reduce pupil turnover when families move house.

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<sup>9</sup> This was highlighted by the Audit Commission in *Kingston upon Hull City Council Corporate Governance inspection June 2002* and is subject to a recommendation emanating from this report.

## **Recommendation**

### **In order to raise significantly the proportion of children receiving early years education:**

- identify the reasons for the low take-up of provision and take steps to increase it.

143. The compact shape of the city and the location of schools in relation to the main housing estates have contributed to a polarisation of parental perceptions of particular schools. A core of secondary schools are regularly over-subscribed and there is a large number of first preferences for schools in the East Riding where the number of places offered to Kingston upon Hull children is declining. Given this context, the high proportion of appeals is not surprising, although not enough is done to ameliorate their impact.

144. The appeals procedure, managed by the council, is unsatisfactory, with many appeals dealt with too slowly. Some children are unable to attend induction days at the end of the summer term and many schools are uncertain of their final admissions until well after the start of the new school year. This makes planning for the new intake more difficult than it should be.

145. The parent information booklets are generally in line with the code of practice. However, the language is complex, the presentation in parts is unclear and there is inadequate advice about translation facilities for parents who do not read English. The secondary booklet is not distributed until after schools have held their open evenings in the autumn term. This misses an opportunity to alert parents to the operation of the admission criteria at an early stage. Moreover, the scheduling of open evenings is unsatisfactory, with several on the same evening. This limits parents' opportunities to view the city's secondary schools.

## **Recommendation**

### **In order to improve admission arrangements:**

- take steps to reduce the number of secondary admission appeals and ensure that appeals are completed before the end of the summer term; and
- review admissions booklets to make them more useful to parents.

146. The Diocesan representatives are adequately consulted about admission issues. The admissions forum meets twice yearly to conduct formal business, but has not been as active as it could be in addressing planning issues with the neighbouring LEA or previous concerns about the dual system of admission dates to primary schools.

## **Asset management**

147. Asset management planning is satisfactory and improving. Shortcomings in the original plan meant that the condition survey could not be used in the first round of needs-based improvement grants. However, advice from the DfES has been

followed and the latest plan was approved with only minor recommendation for improvement.

148. The local policy statement is a readable document with levels of future need and sources of funding clearly identified together with details of the capital projects to be supported. A working group of stakeholders, including diocesan and headteacher representatives has now, rightly, been established, but its current remit is too restricted. Although the group monitors the implementation of the plan and advises on the criteria for prioritising expenditure, it does not, for example, recommend the prioritisation of individual projects. The plan links well to other corporate and directorate objectives and there is a clear focus on the standards agenda. Although new headteachers are well briefed on asset management as part of their induction, there has been no training for serving headteachers or governors who lack confidence in this area.

149. The LEA's monitoring of schools' formula capital is underdeveloped. Total expenditure on building work and changes in the condition survey are checked, but there are no formal links with surveyors working with schools and no examination of school development plans.

150. Capital planning for major projects is effective and well managed. The council has set aside £35 million from the sale of the telecommunications company for repairs and improvements in schools. Nevertheless, the backlog of repairs remains high and is decreasing only slowly. There are many examples of the creative use of funding from different sources being brought together to address both maintenance requirements and improve the suitability of premises. The council rightly takes some pride in having the first new primary school in England to be funded under the Private Finance Initiative. An innovative partnering arrangement with local construction companies is being successfully developed to secure better value for money in major projects through greater transparency of costing and the involvement of all stakeholders including headteachers, governors, architects and builders at an early stage.

### **Provision for the education of pupils who have no school place**

151. Provision for pupils who have no school place is satisfactory with only a few weaknesses. Although this function was not inspected previously, provision has been strengthened in key areas. Excluded pupils have received 25 hours education for the past two years and alternative education is provided within the 15-day limit in almost all cases.

152. The LEA has a clearly defined strategy to provide high quality education and to meet statutory requirements. Monitoring procedures are good; officers have a thorough knowledge of individual cases. There are effective systems in place to track missing pupils and bring them back into the system. The four pupil referral units, which separately cater for primary, Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and schoolgirl mothers and their babies, have all received good Ofsted inspection reports. Monitoring procedures are good, with an increasing emphasis on progress and attainment to tackle low standards.

153. However, this provision has been severely eroded in the past year by the need to accommodate around 70 pupils at short notice, following the closure of one residential school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and a freeze on placements to another, both in a neighbouring authority. In addition, permanent exclusions have increased significantly. In the short term, this has changed the nature of three of the pupil referral units. Referral systems were working well, but have stalled temporarily with the withdrawal of part-time places for Key Stage 2 pupils and a lack of flexibility in work with secondary schools.

154. Reintegration rates are low, but comprehensive plans are in hand to reduce the number of pupils who spend more than eight weeks in a pupil referral unit. A panel of secondary headteachers has recently been established to manage re-admissions across the city on an equitable basis. In return, the LEA is providing two places for each participating school to be used flexibly as part of their behaviour management strategy. The LEA is also proposing measures to reduce the number of appeals, which has constrained its ability to reintegrate pupils back into mainstream.

155. One hundred and thirty six children are educated at home. The number has increased as a result of parents failing to obtain a place at the school of their choice. The LEA works hard to reintegrate these pupils into mainstream schooling as quickly as possible. There are good monitoring procedures and swift action is taken when the home provision is unsatisfactory.

156. The arrangements for pupils out of school on medical grounds is highly satisfactory. The work of the home-tuition service is monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. It provides a flexible and responsive service both at home and in hospital and forges good links with schools in order to ensure continuity of learning. There are effective procedures for reintegration and appropriate provision for those few children who are unable to attend school for more than a short period.

## **Attendance**

157. This function was not scheduled for fieldwork. However, the inspection of documentation led to a more detailed examination of the support provided. Support for attendance remains satisfactory. The three recommendations from the previous inspection covering schools, parents and the youth service were implemented, but have been only partly successful. Most schools have adopted strategies for combating irregular attendance and have seen improvements as a result. Measures taken to encourage parents to be aware of their role in encouraging good attendance and to involve the youth service in working with pupils with records of low attendance have had limited impact city-wide.

158. The LEA has taken appropriate action to improve attendance. Data indicates that while progress has been made on improving attendance, particularly in primary schools where improvement is among the fastest in the country, there are still outstanding problems in secondary schools. Attendance in primary schools is now just below the national average. Attendance in secondary schools has improved in the last three years, faster than in any other LEA. It needed to - in 1999/2000 it was the worst in the country and is still well below the national average.

Unauthorised absence in secondary schools is double the national average. The worsening trend of declining attendance from primary to secondary schools and the poor attendance of pupils in Year 11 are of particular concern. The prime reasons for poor attendance are parentally condoned absence and holidays in term-time.

### **Behaviour support**

159. At the previous inspection, strategies for improving behaviour were judged to be effective and the number of permanent exclusions had reduced significantly. Progress has been too slow since then and the LEA's performance of this function is now unsatisfactory. Although exclusions were well below the national average in both primary and secondary schools in 2001, numbers have increased significantly in both phases in the last year. In 2002, 18 primary pupils were permanently excluded, which fell far short of its target of five. The total number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools exceeded the LEA's Excellence in Cities target by 50 per cent. All secondary schools have targets for reducing permanent exclusions, but nine schools failed to meet them last year. In addition, the number of fixed-term exclusions has risen dramatically in secondary and special schools at a time when the LEA has set targets for a ten per cent reduction year-on-year. An analysis of Ofsted inspection data shows a deterioration in schools' climate between first and second round inspections. The increase in the number of schools requiring much improvement in this area is greater than in the LEA's statistical neighbours and in schools nationally.

160. The LEA's strategy for improving behaviour lacks coherence at all levels and is mainly reactive. As a result, much of the good work on the ground has limited impact. Both the recently updated behavioural support plan and the EDP set out appropriate and complementary objectives based on an analysis of need, but these are being pursued separately. Nowhere is a continuum of provision identified and communicated to schools.

161. The management of support for behaviour is piecemeal, with a lack of clarity as to where responsibility lies in relation to SEN issues and more general support. Teams and individuals within learning services work in isolation on similar issues. Communication is not good enough. There is no mechanism that brings together all those involved in supporting schools to plan strategically and evaluate the impact of their work. Working links between the Excellence in Cities partnership and education support services are poor.

### **Recommendations**

**In order that implementation of the LEA's behaviour strategy is coherent and effective in promoting social inclusion:**

- review strategic management and clarify roles and responsibilities; and
- improve structures and communication within learning services and with the Excellence in Cities partnership.

**In order to support secondary schools in meeting their permanent exclusion targets:**



- review support for behaviour to ensure an effective continuum of provision is available to schools and communicate this clearly to them; and
- make better use of data to target behaviour support to schools' needs.

162. Support for the improvement of behaviour in primary schools is of sound quality, but there is insufficient capacity to meet schools' needs as they confirm in the school survey. An accreditation programme has proved effective in enabling a quarter of the LEA's schools to develop policies and procedures for behaviour management. Outreach work undertaken by the primary pupil referral unit is well regarded by schools. However, the temporary inability to provide part-time places at the pupil referral unit for those pupils at risk of exclusion alongside the growing number of permanent exclusions has led to plans to improve funding to primary schools and to develop two satellite units in the coming year.

163. Support for secondary schools has improved with the appointment of an adviser for social inclusion. A comprehensive training programme has been run and clear guidance has been issued to schools. The LEA has access to comprehensive data on exclusions, but has not targeted support at schools where the rise in exclusions has been significant. The introduction and development of learning support units has not made the expected impact; most exist in isolation and have not been developed as part of a strategic continuum for behaviour support. The LEA has usefully carried out a thorough review of every unit, which clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses in provision, and makes appropriate recommendation. Following a review of learning mentors, they are now being deployed in a more targeted way to support vulnerable groups, including those in public care.

### **Health, safety, welfare and child protection**

164. The LEA makes good provision for health, safety, welfare and child protection. These functions were not inspected previously. The health and safety documentation provided to schools is of good quality. They receive clear advice and have access to effective training; they also appreciate the prompt action taken to tackle safety issues. No key health and safety issues have been identified in school inspection reports. Teacher representatives value the advice and support provided by the effective and efficient occupational health unit.

165. Several useful initiatives promote healthy lifestyles with 60 per cent of schools involved in the Healthy Schools Award. The Drug Action Team undertakes preventative work in schools to combat a growing problem of drug misuse and there is a project to help school-age children quit smoking.

166. Support for child protection is good. The LEA effectively meets its statutory responsibilities for child protection. A designated senior officer plays a significant role on the local area child protection committee. There is good monitoring by the area child protection committee of procedures, plans and implementation of recommendation. Partners from education, the police, social services, health and probation work together well at a strategic level. There are clear protocols for recording and sharing information. However, insufficient attention was given to

minimising the impact of staff changes in the recent reorganisation of social services, which has caused some disruption to provision. A witness service is particularly valuable in supporting young people at risk.

167. Joint training for child protection co-ordinators prepares them well for their role. An up-to-date register is kept of named people and courses attended. All schools have accessed training. Modifications in referral procedures in response to the Human Rights Act had caused some concern amongst teachers, which recent training has alleviated. Appropriate training and information is available for governors.

### **Looked after children**

168. Support for looked after children is satisfactory. It was not inspected in 1999. There are 660 children of school age in the care of the local authority; of that, about a third are educated in other authorities. The council made a commitment to the role of corporate parent in 2000. Joint working between directorates for learning and social services is well established at a strategic level, backed up by joint policy statements and action plans. Priority is given to admissions to schools of looked after children. A shared database has been established between the LEA and social services. Helpfully, this is to be further developed through a Pathfinder initiative to allow sharing of common data with the health trust. Operationally, there has been good joint working between education welfare officers, support teachers, social workers and carers to support attainment and attendance. Greater attention is rightly being directed on the early identification of children at risk and preventative work with families and in early years settings. All schools have a designated teacher and training programmes are on going. The LEA has supported the Turnabout project managed by Barnardos to improve the attainment of looked after children through the work of learning mentors. However, the emerging good practice has yet to make a visible impact.

169. Attainment of looked after children is unsatisfactory. In 2001, attainment in all key stages was below the LEA average. No looked after children achieved five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE in either 2001 or 2002. However, provisional data for 2002 shows some improvement in the proportion achieving A\*-G grades, with looked after children outscoring the LEA average. Attendance of pupils is in line with the LEA average in primary schools and below in secondary schools, though there are signs of improvement at Key Stage 3. Although officers from education and social services act as advocates for looked after children at governors' exclusion meetings, the number permanently excluded rose in 2001.

170. Recent progress indicates that the joint working between the LEA and social services has the capacity to drive improvement in this area. However, the recent reorganisation of social services led to difficulties for some schools. The staffing of operational plans is well directed in support of the education and welfare of looked after children. A much-needed review of personal education plans and the action to support them shows a determination to raise attainment through improving the engagement of teachers, social workers and carers.

## **Measures to combat racism**

171. The LEA's work on combating racism was not inspected previously; the performance of this function is poor. It has been a low priority for the council that has failed, until very recently, to see race equality as an integral part of its equal opportunities agenda.

172. The council met the May deadline for implementing its race equality scheme, but has only very recently appointed champions from elected members and the corporate strategic management team; training for these has only just begun and has yet to reach the majority of the workforce. It has not established an effective system for monitoring progress across services and holding them to account. Consultation mechanisms are poorly developed with local minority ethnic communities, both at council and departmental level, although this is now being actively addressed. Equality targets have been set, although they do not take into account the increase in the minority ethnic population since the 1991 census. Until very recently, the council's employment policies restricted the ability of departments to meet these targets.

173. In the absence of a steer from the council, learning services has been proactive in developing a race equality scheme and evaluating its own practice. The scheme is in its infancy, but recognises that learning services is working from a low base and has established comprehensive performance indicators with most areas accorded high priority in its action plan. This has the potential to eliminate inconsistencies between services and to lead to improvement.

174. Work with schools is underdeveloped. Guidance was issued following the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, but this has not been taken forward systematically and schools have not been sufficiently challenged to tackle the issues raised. Conferences and courses have not been well attended and training for governors is not included in the core programme. Monitoring is planned, but has not yet been implemented. A self-evaluation schedule is about to be introduced into schools, but the LEA is unaware of how many schools have a race equality policy. The LEA has a racial harassment policy, but the recording and reporting of racist incidents in schools has not been pursued vigorously; only four schools submitted a return last year. Strengths and weaknesses have yet to be identified systematically and not enough has been done to uncover racial harassment, to raise awareness and to share good practice.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to promote race equality in schools:**

- identify strengths and weaknesses in school practice;
- implement a training programme to support schools in undertaking self-evaluation of race equality; and
- ensure that all schools record and report racist incidents firstly to governors and then to the LEA, including nil returns.

## SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

### Introduction

175. At the time of the previous inspection, the focus was firmly on the effectiveness of the LEA to drive school improvement, rather than on the impact of the corporate centre on its work. The need for learning services to liaise with community services to evaluate the impact of housing policies on the city's schools was the thrust of a key recommendation in the report.

176. Progress in this area has been too slow. It is only now, following the publication of the corporate governance inspection report, that the need to improve liaison between council departments has become a key issue, so as to promote effective joint working across corporate services. A managing director was appointed in April to take responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the council. The chief executive, who had undertaken this work previously, retired in October. The managing director has proposed a new management structure for the council, but at the time of the inspection, only at chief officer level. The aim to improve cross departmental working is right and worthy, but the uncertainty created by the publication of only part of a structure is in danger of undermining recent fragile improvements in corporate working.

### Corporate planning

177. There remains a lack of coherence in the council's plans in relation to education and learning issues, although targets are consistent. The council now has its key plans in place: its *Corporate Plan* was updated and published just prior to the May election; it reiterates the council's commitment to creating a local culture that 'promotes and respects learning'. The recently published *Community Strategy* for the city has 'creating a learning city' as one of its eight strategic themes. This is a clear document, which states baseline measures against which success will be measured and targets achieved. However, there is no explicit linkage between the activities detailed in this plan, the key learning objectives and related issues in the corporate plan, and those identified in the LEA's EDP.

178. However, following consultation with a wide range of partners and a media campaign to obtain citizen's views, the director of learning services has produced a very helpful *Strategic Framework for Learning Services*. This document has as its objectives those of the corporate plan and has five themes, which reflect the priorities of the EDP and the city's wider learning agenda. Moreover, an annex to the *Framework* very usefully indicates how corporate plans and the LEA's plans support these themes.

179. The monitoring and evaluation of progress in the implementation of corporate plans is unsatisfactory. There are arrangements for reporting on progress on the Best Value Performance Plan and the corporate plan. However, these arrangements are not widely known, applied to other plans, or sufficiently broad; progress towards targets is monitored and reported on quarterly, but there is no evaluation of the appropriateness, content or effectiveness of these plans.

180. Service planning within the learning services is satisfactory. Major service areas are required to produce plans against which progress is measured on a regular basis. However, in a number of the plans the resources to deliver particular actions are not given or lack specificity; in addition, timescales for the completion of actions are often too broad.

### **Decision making**

181. The recent upheaval in the council, with a change of political leadership and the appointment of a managing director while the chief executive is still in post, has provided a timely opportunity to review decision-making arrangements. However, the cabinet comprises three temporary chief officers and only the director of learning services has a guaranteed position in the new structure. Consequently, after five months, little progress has been made in improving the speed and effectiveness of decision making in the council overall, with corporate meetings that are insufficiently targeted on key priorities.

182. Decisions on school closures to reduce surplus places have, in the past, often been protracted and subject to a change of mind by members, which has frustrated both progress and those involved. The decision to refer the most recent proposals to an independent commission has improved the consultation process and all party commitment to tackle the problem.

183. Within learning services, decisions are timely. An annual cycle of consultation on both the size and allocation of school budgets is now well established. Decisions are communicated promptly. Governors, rightly, are now being given a stronger voice than in the past. Appropriate consultation is taking place currently on proposals surrounding the provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

184. Members are provided with good quality, succinct documentation, which facilitates their decision-making. Arguments are cogently presented and in the vast majority of cases, a range of costed options are given. In the recent independent review of primary school places, officers supplemented the commission's report with the financial implications of the various alternatives. Members appreciate the climate of openness and frankness now exhibited by senior officers in learning services and feel well-informed. Members of all parties felt, rightly, that the new director was very approachable and willing to spend time with them explaining the detail underpinning aspects of educational decision-making. Within learning services, the roles and responsibilities of officers and members are clear and adhered to. There is a clear understanding about which decisions should be referred to cabinet and which can be taken by the portfolio holder.

185. Scrutiny arrangements, criticised overall in the corporate governance inspection report<sup>10</sup>, are slowly bedding down. The Scrutiny Commission for Lifelong Learning comprises an equal number of representatives from the two main parties

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<sup>10</sup> Scrutiny arrangements are subject to a recommendation in the *Corporate Governance Inspection Report*

and one representative from each of the two minority parties alongside diocesan and governor representatives. A heavy work programme has been published and the scope of its first education item to be addressed has been drawn up. However, there is a lack of clarity about the place of scrutiny in the decision making process. It is unclear as to whether the focus of the commission's work is to scrutinise policy decisions or to comment on proposals in advance of decisions being made by cabinet.

### **Leadership of officers and elected members**

186. Learning services continues to enjoy good support from elected members and the education portfolio holder. Although only recently appointed, the portfolio holder for lifelong learning demonstrated a good grasp of the key issues and a keenness and enthusiasm to drive forward the standards agenda, yet make tough decisions when necessary. Elected members from all four parties demonstrated a good understanding of the challenges facing education in the city. However, the leadership does not yet articulate a clear and coherent vision and strategy on which developments in learning services would be based.

187. The new director is down-to-earth and provides effective leadership. His management style is open, transparent, challenging yet supportive. He has his eye on the ball, is whole-heartedly committed to raising standards in schools and is rightly intolerant of those with insufficiently high expectations of pupils. However, arrangements for monitoring the work and effectiveness of the director and learning services overall are inadequate. The director has had insufficient one-to-one contact with either the chief executive or the managing director since he was appointed, other than through formal cabinet meetings. The director does not have targets and is not included in performance management arrangements. This is unsatisfactory.

### **Recommendation**

#### **In order to maximise the effectiveness of the work of learning services:**

- implement performance management arrangements for the director of learning services.

188. Senior officers now provide effective leadership. Previously, responsibility was not sufficiently delegated to them and they had little opportunity to take risks and be accountable for their actions. Officers and members talked enthusiastically about the improvements that had resulted from 'the wind of change' that had blown through learning services this year.

189. The self-evaluation carried out by learning services' directorate for this inspection shows that senior officers, for the most part, have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of its work. The evaluation was rigorous and detailed, thus providing a timely review for the LEA's work on the arrival of the new director. There were only two functions, behaviour and admissions, that this

inspection found to be less than satisfactory, which the LEA had evaluated otherwise.

## **Partnership**

190. Although there were examples of effective partnership working at the time of the previous inspection, it was recognised that the LEA had not consistently made the necessary commitment of time and expertise to liaison with key partners. Little progress was made on the recommendation in the 1999 report until the interim manager took up post in September 2001.

191. Since then, noticeable progress has been made and work with partners is now satisfactory. The vast majority of partners speak highly of improved partnership working and of the continuing commitment of the new director to work collaboratively to promote the standards agenda.

192. Communications with schools have been improved. Meeting structures for primary headteachers and special school headteachers have been instigated and complement secondary headteacher meetings, which are well established. The director has sensibly introduced a joint cross-phase strategy group to share ideas and inform policy-making. A partnership arrangement, brokered by the DfES, for an external contractor to work with the LEA in providing additional support to secondary schools through the Excellence in Cities initiative, is in an early stage of development. Relationships with the Education Action Zone are good.

193. Relationships with the local dioceses are satisfactory and developing. They are adequately consulted and have representation on appropriate LEA committees.

194. There are a number of particularly effective partnerships including the Early Years Childcare and Development Partnership. There is a clear commitment from the LEA to work with the local learning and skills council at a strategic level. The identification, by the director, of five themes for education to underpin the LEA's work has been shared with the Learning Partnership and the local learning and skills council. These themes fit closely with those of key partners, thus providing a crucial and common thrust for the development of learning across the city. Relationships with the local universities are good with one of them providing valuable opportunities for teachers' professional development. The head of community learning chairs the local management board of Connexions and relationships with the area-wide service are good.

195. There are very good relationships at a strategic level between the LEA and the police, who provide excellent support for truancy sweeps across the city, and with the community health trust and social services. However, the plethora of uncoordinated initiatives across the city involving the same agencies is time-consuming and dissipates the effectiveness of much good work. Nevertheless, structures are in place for these meetings and partners are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. As identified in the corporate governance inspection report, however, there had been a lack of dialogue between community services and learning services in relation to developing a strategy that links surplus places in schools with the wider issues of over-provision of housing stock.

## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

***The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:***

**In order to engage secondary headteachers effectively in raising attainment:**

- agree with them a set of actions to improve partnership working with the LEA, primary schools and post-16 institutions; and
- reinforce the council's expectations of headteachers in raising standards and developing inclusive schools that are responsive to the needs of the local community and the city as a whole.

**In order to promote race equality in schools:**

- identify strengths and weaknesses in school practice;
- implement a training programme to support schools in undertaking self-evaluation of race equality; and
- ensure that all schools record and report racist incidents firstly to governors and then to the LEA, including nil returns.

**In order to maximise the effectiveness of the work of learning services:**

- implement performance management arrangements for the director of learning services.

***The following recommendations are fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement and should be addressed as soon as practicable:***

**In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenging schools, the LEA should:**

- adjust the categorisation of schools to ensure a more realistic profile of school effectiveness and ensure that every school is clear about its categorisation and entitlement to monitoring and support.

**In order to improve the strategic management of ICT and its use to raise standards:**

- review the capacity of the LEA to provide schools with the expertise they need to use ICT effectively in the classroom; and



- provide training for all ICT co-ordinators on the levelling of pupils' ICT work and put in place opportunities for schools to undertake cross-phase moderation;
- extend the dissemination of good practice across schools.

**In order to develop an ethnic minority support service that has the capacity to meet the changing needs of schools:**

- implement a service plan that identifies and prioritises service objectives clearly; and
- evaluate the capacity of the service to meet new objectives and implement a professional development programme to address needs.

**In order to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils:**

- ensure that the work of the ethnic minority support service is an integral part of school improvement; and
- develop curriculum guidance and provide training for schools.

**In order to improve levels of attainment of gifted and talented pupils:**

- target provision and support on the identified needs of specific cohorts of pupils.

**In order to enhance the strategic management role of governors:**

- ensure that all records of visits are sent directly to chairs of governors.

**In order to improve the electronic transfer of information:**

- ensure, during the updating of the corporate IT infra-structure, that the needs of learning services and schools are recognised and acted upon.

**In order to improve the efficiency of assessments:**

- agree a plan with the local primary care trusts to tackle the causes of delay in the production of statements.

**In order to reduce the number of appeals made to the SEN tribunal:**

- agree with the external contractor a plan to significantly reduce the number of appeals.

**In order to raise significantly the proportion of children receiving early years education:**

- identify the reasons for the low take-up of provision and take steps to increase it.

**In order to improve admission arrangements:**

- take steps to reduce the number of secondary admission appeals and ensure that appeals are completed before the end of the summer term; and
- review admissions booklets to make them more useful to parents.

***We also make the following recommendations:***

**In order to improve school autonomy:**

- provide guidance on the procurement of services beyond those of the council so that schools can make informed choices; and
- make available access to client advice for schools wishing to explore alternative providers for facilities management services.

**In order to improve the management of school places:**

- strengthen the school organisation plan to provide a clear framework for future reorganisation proposals, linking the plan with the council's strategy for excess housing.

**In order that implementation of the LEA's behaviour strategy is coherent and effective in promoting social inclusion:**

- review strategic management and clarify roles and responsibilities; and
- improve structures and communication within learning services and with the Excellence in Cities partnership.

**In order to support secondary schools in meeting their permanent exclusion targets:**

- review support for behaviour to ensure an effective continuum of provision is available to schools and communicate this clearly to them; and
- make better use of data to target behaviour support to schools' needs.

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