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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (July 1999)* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 70 schools. The response rate was 84 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery, three infant, two junior and five primary schools. Four secondary and three special schools were also visited, together with one of the City's Pupil Referral Units. A further ten schools, including two special schools, were visited as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy monitoring sample. Generally the visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. The City of Portsmouth became a unitary authority in 1997. From the outset the new City Council was keen to demonstrate its commitment to high levels of delegation and to make a virtue of its size by providing integrated services for the benefit of local people. Much of this has been achieved. Portsmouth is now a well-managed LEA, with many strong features. It has, however, not yet had sufficient impact on raising standards in its schools.

5. The new Council faced a serious difficulty in its early days in its 'inheritance' from Hampshire of a dearth of Year 7 places, and had to take urgent steps to open a new 1000+ place secondary school in September 1999. The LEA has also responded to high levels of parental concern by revising its admissions policies for mainstream schools and established catchment areas. This has been achieved with quiet efficiency.

6. However senior officers and members did not give sufficient priority to raising standards, and the credibility of the Council was seriously undermined by the very public loss of confidence on the part of schools in the first City Education officer (CEO). Initiatives such as the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and the National Literacy Strategy were not effectively managed. Levels of challenge and intervention to support schools were inadequate and had little impact on the slow rates of improvement, particularly in attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4.

7. Despite these setbacks, a genuine partnership was established between the LEA and its schools, which remains a powerful feature today. Communication and consultation are effective with schools and other agencies. The speed and openness of financial decision making is a strength. Relationships with social services are very good. Measures taken to combat social exclusion are innovative. Two of the three sections within the education department (pupil services and resources management) have been managed efficiently and creatively throughout. Some aspects of the work of the school improvement service in school improvement have been effective. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy has been successful. A new ICT adviser has been appointed and has been given the resources to do the job properly. The LEA now performs the majority of its functions at least effectively. Its performance of the following functions is good or very good:

- support to schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses;
- support for numeracy in primary schools;
- support for newly qualified teachers;
- support for governors;
- early years education;
- admissions arrangements;
- asset management;
- provision of management support services to schools, including financial management;
- the planning and supply of school places;
- provision for young people in public care;
- support for pupils with special educational needs;

- provision for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds;
- support for pupils at risk of exclusion.

8. Of most significance was the swift action taken by the Council to regain the confidence and goodwill of schools with, first the appointment of an acting CEO to bring stability at the beginning of 1998 and, second with the substantive appointment in December of that year. Nevertheless members do not subject the education service to systematic scrutiny. Although many of the shortcomings have since been addressed, the following functions are not yet being discharged effectively:

- aspects of the support for school improvement, particularly in the areas of target-setting, Information Communication Technology and the management of the National Literacy Strategy;
- raising standards in secondary schools;
- procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement.

9. The new CEO has done much to rebuild the LEA's credibility by providing strong leadership and strategic direction. A much needed re-structuring of the school improvement service has taken place and a new team of appropriately qualified advisers take up appointment in April 2000. Theirs is no easy task. The judgement of the team is that the LEA has the capacity to remedy its weaknesses. However, urgent action is still required, not just by officers of the education service, but also by members and all schools, if Portsmouth LEA is to meet its targets for raising standards by 2002.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

10. Portsmouth became a unitary authority in 1997 and is one of the most densely populated district authorities in the United Kingdom, outside London. The Council serves a population of 190,200. Unemployment is falling and at 3.1 per cent is one of the lowest in England. There are, however, pockets of severe deprivation; just under 10 per cent of households are headed by a lone parent. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average (22.4 per cent in primary and 19.7 per cent for secondary). The 1991 census recorded that 2.6 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups which comprise mainly Bangladeshi, Chinese or Indian heritage.

11. Portsmouth has 73 schools. The LEA provides 2 nursery schools, including 1 for pupils with special educational needs; 53 primary, including 22 infant and 17 junior; 10 secondary schools; 5 special schools and 3 pupil referral units (PRUs) including one for teenage mothers. The LEA offers a place to every four year old. The school population is rising; two new secondary schools have opened in the past four years. The majority of pupils pursue their education post-16 in the further education sector locally. Only one secondary school has a sixth form.

Performance

12. A detailed statistical analysis of school performance was supplied to the LEA by OFSTED. However, in order to indicate the nature of the task facing the LEA, the following general statements may be helpful:

- attainment is in line with national averages in Key Stage 1 but declines through Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4, where GCSE attainment was well below national averages in 1999;
- against the national trend, girls are not consistently out-performing boys in Portsmouth schools;
- the LEA has identified twenty eight schools as causing concern including one primary and two secondary schools currently in special measures. One of the three PRUs was judged by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses;
- there has been a steady improvement in attendance rates in primary and secondary schools, although figures remain below the national average; levels of both authorised and unauthorised absence are also comparatively high;
- the rate of permanent exclusions, particularly in secondary schools, is above national averages. However, officers report a dramatic reduction in the number of permanent exclusions since April 1997, although fixed term exclusions have risen in the same period.

Funding

13. Education is a priority of the Council and the level of funding has been consistently above standard spending assessment (SSA). The Council passed on, in full, the increases in SSA in its first two budgets and will do so again for the coming year. The Council has an overall expenditure plan covering three years and the education department is now developing its own strategy. The consistent commitment to pass on SSA increases provides welcome reassurance for schools about the likely future levels of delegated budgets.

14. The Council has been successful in obtaining grants to supplement its spending on schools. Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects have included significant education elements. There are satisfactory arrangements for informing service managers of bidding opportunities, supporting the bidding process, and co-ordinating submissions. Support is available but not well publicised for individual schools in bidding for grants.

15. In terms of capital spending, the Council has supplemented its borrowing and grant income by the sale of assets and by diverting significant sums from its revenue budget. Funding for the LEA's newest secondary school is being provided through a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme.

Council structure

16. Portsmouth City Council consists of 39 members (20 Labour, 10 Conservative and nine Liberal Democrat). Education is one of 11 committees of the Council. The education department comprises: pupil services, resources management and the school improvement service.

The allocation of resources to priorities

17. Overall spending on primary schools compares favourably with the unitary authorities' average. Spending on secondary schools is broadly comparable with the average.

	Primary Local Schools Budget [LSB] per pupil	Secondary Local Schools Budget [LSB] per pupil
Portsmouth	£2288	£2834
Unitary authorities	£2197	£2917
All English LEAs	£2293	£2987

18. The LEA delegates a significantly higher proportion of spending on schools (85.7 per cent of the LSB) than the average for both unitary authorities and all LEAs nationally (80.6 per cent and 80.3 per cent). Significant factors involved are the delegation of funding for school meals and for special educational needs. Schools are content with the range of responsibilities delegated. Centrally controlled spending on statutory and regulatory duties and on school improvement is very similar to the unitary authorities average.

19. Delegated funding for Portsmouth primary and secondary schools is higher than the averages for unitary authorities.

	Primary Schools Budget [ISB] per pupil	Individual Budget [ISB] per pupil	Secondary Schools Budget [ISB] per pupil	Individual Budget [ISB] per pupil
Portsmouth	£1918		£2490	
Unitary authorities	£1667		£2400	
All English LEAs	£1733		£2433	

20. The LEA has continued to use the funding formula inherited from Hampshire. Schools placed the highest priority at the time of local government reorganisation on maintaining delegated funding in real terms per pupil and this discouraged a fundamental review. Earlier work done by Hampshire on a needs-led analysis of school spending did guide the decision in 1998/99 to deploy growth in the ISB heavily in favour of the primary sector.

21. Although the LEA experienced similar problems to other new authorities in setting its first two years' budgets, two factors made management of these budgets somewhat easier than elsewhere. The first was fortuitous in that budgets were set at a higher level than was subsequently revealed to be needed in order to maintain existing overall levels of activity. The second was that members agreed a comparatively high level of delegation to officers to transfer money within the overall cash limit they had set. Together these have provided both an ability to make the detailed adjustments necessary as the budget settled down and some scope to fund new developments in priority areas. The action taken by officers in such respects has been reported on a regular basis to members.

22. SEN expenditure represents a similar proportion of the LEA's schools budget to that in other unitary authorities. However, the approach taken by the LEA is more innovative than seen in many LEAs nationally and enjoys a high degree of confidence in schools. There are clear criteria for the allocation and review of resources deployed from central budgets. The use made by schools of delegated funding is closely monitored. It is delegated through an audit approach which allocates funding at one of three levels according to need. Pupils' needs are assessed against stated criteria regardless of whether a pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Headteachers are involved in moderating submissions. Additionally random checks are made on school audit submissions as part of the process to ensure consistency. The system has reduced the demand from schools for high incidence statements as the main means of accessing additional resources and the formula enjoys a high degree of confidence in schools.

23. Overall the speed, openness and effectiveness of decision making, particularly financial decision making, is a strength of Portsmouth LEA. Consultation with schools on the preparation of the Council's budget is good and their views have been influential in the deployment of funds. Briefings for heads and governors have been of high quality, both in terms of information and presentational style. Schools

appreciate what they see as a strong commitment to transparency and dialogue in the decision making process.

The Education Development Plan

24. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is a satisfactory document and was approved by the Secretary of State for Education in March 1999 for three years. The LEA identified the following six priority areas for school improvement:

- Supporting the improvement of the core skills of Literacy, Numeracy, IT and Science from Early Years to Key Stage 3.
- Supporting the development of professional expertise.
- Supporting school self review as a key means to improvement.
- Support and intervention in schools causing concern, identified as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures.
- Promoting social inclusion, supporting excellence for all.
- Improve attainment and progress in Key Stage 4.

25. Although reasonable progress was being made towards delivering the priorities, the new CEO was concerned that the EDP was not based on a sufficiently thorough audit of need and that it was unlikely to achieve the required improvement. In 1999 only the Key Stage 2 mathematics targets were met. Furthermore, it had to a large extent been steered by the corporate strategy unit and had little ownership in schools. As a consequence a revised EDP has been produced in conjunction with schools and based on wide ranging consultation. The revised EDP has since been approved by the Secretary of State. The changes recognise some of the weaknesses of the first document by introducing a clearer focus on targets for attainment, a reduction in the number of priorities and a more precise description of how the LEA will monitor and evaluate the impact of the EDP actions. However, the loss of focus on the Key Stage 4 curriculum as a separately identified priority is regrettable. The LEA did not meet its GCSE targets in 1999. Science is no longer included as a priority. The need to improve the expertise of teachers in order to enhance pupils' learning is now a key plank of the new document. This has been a result of the more active consultation with, and influence of, headteachers. This has, however, resulted in two priorities which focus on teaching, where one might serve. The document is now better focussed on local need. Schools are keen for the action planned to start without further delay, or consultation.

26. Schools regard the priorities of the revised EDP as broadly relevant to their own development needs. The revised draft EDP is well understood by partners of the education service both within the local authority and beyond. The business, further and higher education sectors in Portsmouth are aware that their contributions to raising school attainment are important.

27. Arrangements to evaluate the impact of the current EDP are under-developed. The school improvement service (SIS) has a key responsibility for implementation and monitoring of the actions in the revised EDP. Although not specified in a formal service plan or performance management system, advisers' tasks are reviewed with the head of the SIS each month. The school standards and improvement group has representatives from headteachers, officers and members. Its remit is to monitor standards in schools and by implication the effectiveness of the LEA's implementation of the EDP.

Early Years

28. Provision for Early Years education in Portsmouth is a strength, based on strong partnerships across the City and excellent working relationships. The Council has been successful in promoting good quality nursery education for three and four-year olds, and in the development of services for young children and their families. There is a common understanding between councillors, officers and providers that improving the quality of early years services is a key element in raising standards in the later years of schooling and in tackling social exclusion. Portsmouth's two nursery schools (one of which is a special school) have recently been designated a joint early excellence centre and the authority's application for Sure Start funding has been successful. There are three effective Early Years networks, where schools act as a focal point for parents and providers of services for young children in the neighbourhood. There are plans for the establishment of more networks so that the whole city is included. A development officer, funded by education and social services, and an early years adviser work effectively in partnership to extend services and to promote good practice. The LEA is particularly skilled in disseminating good early years practice, using carefully chosen practitioners from within the city and nationally known experts.

29. All departments of the Council and providers in the private and voluntary sector work well together. The Portsmouth early years development and childcare plan sets out the overall strategy and is supplemented by an Early Years commentary showing clearly how Early Years priorities relate to those in the EDP. There are sufficient part-time places for all four year olds, provided by settings in the private, voluntary and maintained sectors.

Other Services

30. The LEA is taking the lead in setting up a 14–19 steering group with wide representation from further and higher education, training providers, careers, the education business partnership and schools. This group will have a key responsibility to direct the work on improving the quality of teaching in Key Stage 4, and developing a more flexible and work related curriculum. It will also seek to improve the links that schools have with employers and community organisations which was regarded as poor by schools in the Audit Commission survey. This is an appropriate strategy to strengthen transition to post 16 and is well linked to the life long learning partnership. Participants have an impressive commitment to the tasks ahead and to identifying contributions that will be effective.

31. A good start has been made in developing a corporate strategy for Lifelong Learning. The Portsmouth lifelong learning plan has been agreed by the DfEE. The authority is currently engaged in an extensive mapping exercise involving a whole range of external agencies across the City to chart the level of provision for adult learners. Consultation on implementing the LEA's strategy has been thorough and has successfully built on the very good relationships already established with post-16 providers in Portsmouth.

32. An unusual feature of this relatively small authority is the comprehensive school library service, funded mainly by contributions from the schools' own budgets. Virtually all schools choose to participate. It helps schools review and develop their own libraries. Staff from the service participate in a range of training and workshops for pupils, teachers, governors, parents, carers and others. They are actively involved in current initiatives, such as the NLS and Family literacy, and work closely with the Early Years teams and the public library service. The evidence from schools is that it provides high quality support and very good value for money.

Recommendations

- Implement an action plan for the school improvement service which outlines how the priorities of the revised EDP will be actioned, and includes performance management systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact on school improvement.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

33. The EDP sets out the strategy for school improvement. The strengths and weaknesses of the EDP are analysed in paragraph 25. However, not all the LEA's support for school improvement comes within the scope of the EDP. All the services organised under pupil services and resources management make a significant contribution to school improvement.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

34. Monitoring, intervention and support are satisfactory overall, but the challenge offered to schools has been poor. The City Education Officer's advice to members in October 1999 to restructure the school improvement service was an appropriate step which has improved the credibility of the service in schools.

35. The LEA uses a number of approaches to monitor the performance of schools, and this work is now satisfactory in primary and special schools, but less so in secondary schools. LEA monitoring systems have become more rigorous in the past year. School performance and progress are reviewed each month by the head of SIS with each link adviser, and each term by all staff in the SIS. The improving quality of LEA performance data allows an arms length approach to be developed in the future.

36. LEA strategies indicate a good understanding of the principles and implementation of intervention in inverse proportion to success. At present there are termly quality assurance visits by the adviser to each school dealing with target setting, self-review and planning for improvement. This procedure will be reduced to one centrally funded visit only for target setting, with additional visits on a buy back basis. School visits are followed by a written report to the headteacher, and their content is monitored by the head of SIS. Some of the first reports to schools were of poor quality with little evaluative or developmental content, but improvements are evident and the recommendations are now helpful to schools. There are sound arrangements within the education service for sharing information about schools. An appropriate range of clear criteria is used to identify schools which cause concern and thus trigger additional support from the LEA. Headteachers understand the criteria, were involved in their development, and know in which category their school lies. Overall, the LEA knows its schools well.

37. Overall, the professional challenge that the SIS has given to schools has been poor. This is a key weakness of the LEA. Not all attached inspectors have been able, because of limited experience, specialism or lack of training, to give high quality advice. Evidence from school visits during the inspection indicates that headteachers want advisers who can rigorously challenge their performance and offer strategies for improvement. Some curriculum subject and management advice, however, is of a very high standard, but the need for a review was apparent. The head of the newly restructured SIS has tackled these fundamental criticisms with energy and a determination to raise service quality.

38. The new SIS will be fully operational from April 2000. When complete it will include seven full time advisers, four of whom will have a school link role, plus a head of service, an adviser for ICT and an adviser for professional development. The role of the link adviser is well defined and indicates a graduated response to schools in support of target setting, planning, self-review and management. Training and development of the new service have started and consultation with schools is strong. Headteachers report a guarded optimism for the future. The CEO and head of the SIS are giving clear direction and the strategies for school improvement are well supported by schools. It is too early to judge any impact or value for money from this service.

39. When Portsmouth is unable to give specialist help there is only a limited directory or brokerage role from the LEA for securing external consultants. Schools regularly use outside expertise recommended by local networks.

Collection and analysis of data

40. The LEA has made a good start in implementing a central database (PULSE) for tracking individual pupils which is due to become fully operational in July 2000. Officers recognise the potential of the system to support target setting. For example, the data will also be used to monitor the impact of SEN resources and exclusions and, through a geographical information system, to assist in school place planning.

Support to schools on target setting

41. The LEA provides a good range of data to its schools. An annual summary is sent out in early October and provides information on performance in core subjects against other Portsmouth schools, relative to free school meals and SEN ranking, as well as analysis on gender by subject and three year trend data. The annual summary is accompanied by an analysis booklet which asks schools to assess each area of the annual summary by answering questions related to each section. There was general enthusiasm for this method from schools, and many felt it raised issues about attainment that would not otherwise have been identified.

42. The link adviser then visits the school in December to discuss target setting, based on the issues raised by the analysis booklet. It is here that the LEA presents its target for the school. Although there was praise for the work of some SIS staff, many schools felt they were not sufficiently challenged and the process was not having an impact on raising standards. Of the 29 primary schools for which 1999 Key Stage 2 results are available, 11 (37 per cent) of English and 13 (44 per cent) of mathematics targets for 2000 were below the level already attained in 1999. Of these, 6 out of 11 English and 6 out of 13 mathematics targets for 2001 were still below 1999 attainment.

43. In secondary schools too, there is little evidence that the major weakness, Key Stage 4 results, is being tackled through the process of target setting. Out of eight schools, for which attainment data is available, three (37 per cent) had targets for 2000 and indeed 2001, below the 1999 attainment.

44. At the other extreme some schools' targets were set at unrealistic levels, again bringing the process into disrepute. Five of the six lowest achieving schools at Key Stage 2 English had targets for 2000 that were more than 40 per cent above their 1999

attainment. All these had targets for 2001 that were more than 50 per cent above their 1999 attainment, often much higher. In mathematics, two schools, both in the bottom three attaining schools for Key Stage 2 mathematics, had 2000 targets set above 40 per cent of 1999 attainment, and in both cases these targets increased dramatically again for 2001. Many of the most modest targets had been agreed with the most effective schools. This is clearly unacceptable.

45. Too often schools felt that advisers were seeking to impose LEA targets on schools regardless of their individual contexts or the target setting processes already established in schools. As a consequence target setting by the LEA was not seen by a significant number of schools as a tool for raising standards. Good practice in assessment exists in a number of Portsmouth schools, which the LEA is not building upon.

Support for literacy

46. Although there are strengths in the LEA's support for literacy, these are outweighed by the weaknesses. The management of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has not won credibility in schools and as a consequence the general impact on schools has been unsatisfactory. The LEA fully recognises this and has taken appropriate measures to remedy the situation.

47. Standards, as measured by National Curriculum tests, are close to those found nationally and are comparable with those of similar LEAs at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2 they are below national standards but in line with those of similar LEAs. At both key stages the rate of improvement in recent years gives encouraging indications that the efforts of the LEA and individual schools are bearing fruit, even though there is more to be done. The LEA targets for Key Stage 2 up to 2002 are very ambitious but the good general progress has made it possible to adjust the 2001 target upwards. Standards at key stages 3 and 4 are low compared to those found nationally and in similar LEAs. With successive key stages the rate of improvement becomes less.

48. Nevertheless, planning for the NLS has been good. A great deal of useful guidance has been circulated to schools. There have been valuable contributions from related services on, for instance, managing the strategy in respect of pupils with special educational needs and with English as an additional language. The family literacy project is a well established strength with clear signs that the role of parents and carers is being enhanced in the schools where it has been operating. The survey and the school visits indicate a growing appreciation of the expert advice available from the literacy consultant and other LEA personnel.

49. Conversely, the response of schools to the LEA's support was predominantly negative in the school survey. Among the reasons given were that the NLS training courses were not well managed and presented, and that insufficient account was taken of the schools' different starting points. In particular, there was little capitalising on the insights gained by the schools that had participated in the earlier National Literacy Project. There was an unfortunate reluctance, initially at least, to demonstrate good technique and work practically alongside teachers. While it was right to concentrate on the schools where standards were the greatest concern, not

enough was done to promote the strategy in schools in general. In the secondary sector, all literacy managers attended training and there are projects in some schools which are well advanced, but the impact on the curriculum in general is less than might be expected.

50. The LEA has carefully audited the situation with the assistance of a recognised independent consultancy. The project now has appropriately qualified staff to address all the weaknesses mentioned above and give literacy the highest priority. The challenge is to revitalise enthusiasm in the primary schools and establish a brisk pace in development in the secondary schools.

Support for numeracy

51. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been highly effective and is a significant strength. Primary schools have been galvanised into action and improvements in classroom practice are widely reported. An encouraging start has been made in launching the strategy at the secondary stage. The LEA and the schools share a common sense of purpose.

52. Key Stage 1 National Curriculum test results are abreast of those achieved nationally. Key Stage 2 results are in line with those of similar LEAs, although below national norms. There was a 13 per cent improvement at Key Stage 2 last year, which was greater than the national improvement of 10 per cent, and in 1999 the results were already very close to the target set for 2000. The prospect of reaching the LEA's challenging target for 2002 is good, if the effort can be sustained. However, standards in Key Stage 3 are well below national averages.

53. The management of the NNS has been very good, with strong leadership by the mathematics adviser and two consultants and constructive support from senior school representatives. The ground was carefully laid with a high profile public campaign including conferences, roadshows, a newspaper and good quality guidance to parents. The training of teachers was well received and the support in schools was invariably described by the recipients as good, sometimes as excellent. The practical examples of good technique provided by the consultants and the teacher demonstrators are warmly praised and have influenced teaching in the primary sector. Among many other features appreciated by schools are the constructive feedback from lesson observations, the guidance on marking and assessment, the approaches to able pupils, the training for learning support assistants, and the useful bank of teaching materials.

54. The strategy is well under way in the secondary phase, with some schools moving ahead on their own projects with good LEA support. The rest have all been represented at the initial conference and some Key Stage 3 teachers have taken up the opportunities provided to observe the practice at Key Stage 2. The long term success of the strategy depends on how well the secondary schools can build on primary achievements and this, in turn, depends on the ability of the LEA to ensure comparable quality in leadership and training at secondary level. Two of the three specialist staff are moving on and it is important that the LEA maintains the momentum. Equally important will be to take full advantage of the new clusters of

primary and secondary schools to improve continuity in pupils' progress between Key Stages 2 and 3.

Support for ICT

55. The LEA's support for ICT in the curriculum is now improving albeit from a low base, following the appointment of a specialist adviser. A poor start was made in the first 18 months when the government's National Grid for Learning programme (NGfL) was at an early stage; support was unsatisfactory. The guidance was neither of a high enough calibre, nor was it sufficiently accessible. The chief casualties were schools that were obliged to respond quickly to key issues arising from Section 10 reports regarding ICT and those involved in the first phase of the NGfL. Some poor decisions were taken and as a consequence, hardware installations made in schools and centrally are now reported as less than ideal in terms of function or value for money. There are indications that schools with little in-house expertise either marked time or floundered in attempts to plan developments in software and the curriculum.

56. The LEA's audit, based mainly on observation and a scrutiny of OFSTED school reports, indicates that attainment in primary schools is not significantly different from the national pattern overall. In secondary schools standards are more uneven, with a minority of schools well ahead of national standards and the rest somewhat behind. ICT is second only to literacy and numeracy in the LEA's priorities. The adviser will shortly be freed of other responsibilities to give his full attention to the subject.

57. Schools are now receiving sound advice on the most suitable and cost-effective alternatives in purchasing hardware and software. A model for ICT development planning has been offered to all schools with more specific guidance to individual schools, according to needs. Headteachers and subject managers have been extensively involved in curriculum development and guidelines have been produced, or are in train, for each key stage, keeping apace with the national guidance issued by the QCA. A useful resource base is being established at the professional development centre. Training for curriculum development and the introduction of new resources is now viewed favourably. The providers include colleges of higher education, with whom the adviser works closely, accredited NGfL trainers and other carefully selected consultants.

Support to schools causing concern

58. Overall support for schools causing concern is improving. In the past it was too variable in quality, rigour and effectiveness. Before April 1999 there were no clear criteria to identify schools requiring support and intervention and no mechanisms to review the impact of any support offered. The group set up to review schools' progress only met twice in two years. The LEA did not have a secure view of the strengths and weaknesses of its schools.

59. The LEA now has a clear and robust policy on intervention in schools causing concern. There are specific criteria for placing a school in one of four categories. The school's link adviser, at an annual quality assurance visit, reviews the work of the school. This is in the light of clearly defined triggers, including very low

standards of attainment in comparison to national averages or benchmark information, judgements from Section 10 inspection reports and the quality of teaching in the school. The LEA has been keen to identify “coasting” schools, but this has led to nearly one third of Portsmouth’s schools being categorised as causing concern. This figure is too high and the subsequent need for intervention could place an unrealistic load on the school improvement service.

60. Support for schools in special measures is satisfactory. Generally, the support schools receive is well thought out, carefully costed and given in proportion to the seriousness of the concerns. Four schools in Portsmouth have been judged to require special measures since 1997. One secondary school has since come out of special measures. The other two secondary schools and one primary school have been in special measures for less than two years. One pupil referral unit has been judged as having serious weaknesses since September 1997. The schools and the PRU are making reasonable progress in addressing the key issues from their inspection. The LEA meets its statutory duties in regard to schools in special measures, and has set up half-termly review meetings at which all services involved with the school discuss the support which has been offered. These meetings are not sharp enough in evaluating the impact of the support which has been given and are not sufficiently helpful in conveying to schools the LEA’s view on the progress the school is making.

Support to headteachers

61. Support to headteachers to become self-managing has many strengths but some weaknesses. Improving the quality of teaching and learning as well as the skill of headteachers and other staff as leaders and managers are priorities in the revised EDP. Support to increase the school’s capacity to manage improvement was judged to be satisfactory or good in 12 of the 19 schools visited. Where improvement was unsatisfactory, weaknesses arose from the lack of challenge outlined earlier in this report.

62. Regular conferences are organised by headteachers in Portsmouth to deal with management development issues. These are well attended and LEA officers are invited to participate. The LEA supports the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and there has been good take up by headteachers in the first two years. Portsmouth has only recently provided an induction and mentoring programme for new headteachers and this is well regarded by those involved.

63. There is no headteacher appraisal and some heads have not been appraised for up to six years. Some schools do have teacher review or appraisal procedures in place, but the LEA has no accurate data on this. Although a priority in the current EDP, the training and guidance for senior staff on development planning, monitoring and evaluation have been *ad hoc*, and dependent on the skills of the attached inspector. Consequently the effectiveness of self-review in schools is very variable and for some heads the current training programme is a welcome opportunity. The LEA will need to supplement the OFSTED package with more challenging and relevant local data if it is to be an effective tool. An omission from the LEA’s provision currently is a professional development network for deputy heads, although the LEA has encouraged and supported aspiring individual deputies onto the

National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) with considerable success in take-up and outcomes.

64. The PROMOTE programme offers a continuum of generic training for teachers from the start of their career in Portsmouth to preparation for headship. This programme is well regarded by schools and participation is high. It has an appropriate focus on teaching and management skills in the classroom and this matches the priorities of the EDP. The courses are well structured and there is a widespread recognition that they now require a more robust emphasis on the high level skills and competencies needed in teaching and leadership. In addition a small range of curriculum and SEN training is provided.

65. The absence of a published annual programme of courses is a weakness which causes planning difficulties for schools. Parallel with this programme the LEA is establishing a good and active professional development experience for staff with the expertise and skills to be trainers within the LEA. It has benefits for schools to share good practice, for the professional growth of the individual staff concerned and for the LEA to disseminate ideas and strategies that work. This is a good programme which is to be extended in the future.

66. In a number of areas, notably curriculum subjects and specialist parts of education, size does not allow the LEA to provide directly the training and support that are needed. There is, rightly, an intention to expand the LEA's existing small directory and brokerage role although some networks do exist between schools and individual advisers can recommend providers.

67. Portsmouth has a good induction and support programme for Newly Qualified teachers (NQTs) which includes comprehensive guidance to schools about their responsibilities in this regard. The provision is being enhanced this year to offer advice and training prior to taking up post in September. This is a positive step by the LEA to attract new teachers to Portsmouth schools and to give them a confident start in the profession.

Support to governors

68. Support to governors in Portsmouth is good. The extent and quality of the support have improved significantly in the past year. Portsmouth intends to increase the range of services it provides from September 2000 and to ensure that there is a differentiated model which reflects the varying needs of governing bodies.

69. The governor support service provides comprehensive advice and information which includes a training programme that is available as a buy back service. Training is provided in partnership with Hampshire and this joint work and co-ordination of courses will continue. Governors report that the relevance and quality of the training provided are good both with regard to individual courses and tailor made training. Training needs are effectively identified through the governor forum and a questionnaire to each governor. In addition the LEA, through its monitoring of governing body minutes, identifies areas of training need. A training programme for clerks to governors is to be introduced to support the provision of a clerking service from September 2000.

70. Governors are becoming more actively involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the LEA. A review of the governor support service is currently being planned. It will use as its starting point the normal procedures of the governor forum to annually review and plan the training provision. In addition, representative governors have recently been invited to join the four monitoring Boards.

71. The LEA consults and communicates effectively with governors. The CEO and officers attend the forum, discussion is open and honest, and governors are confident that there are clear policy directions for education. The newsletter is well received and the information to chairs of governors is satisfactory. The guidance materials from the support service, for example on appointing a headteacher and target setting, are very helpful, and officers give sound advice when approached. One area of weakness is that in some cases chairs of governors are conscious that headteachers receive information, which they also would welcome. In some cases, the decision to inform governors about the outcomes of visits by advisers is made by the headteacher, and the information is not made routinely available to the chair of governors. This is unsatisfactory.

72. Governor vacancies have been high in Portsmouth. The LEA has established a good procedure to help governors identify candidates and make appropriate appointments. Whilst this has successfully reduced the vacancies by half, concerns remain in some schools about the availability of volunteers. The guidance offered from finance, personnel and pupil services is regarded as good. The education committee has established a buildings panel, which has improved the communication between governors and the buildings section.

Recommendations

- Secure the appointments, training and development for staff in the school improvement service, which will provide schools with robust monitoring in order to support more effective self-review;
- Review, in consultation with schools, the guidance and training for officers, governors and headteachers on analysing and using performance data to set targets to raise standards. This should build on the good practice in assessment that already exists in a number of Portsmouth schools;
- Strengthen the training opportunities for all staff by:
 - * publishing an annual programme of courses for schools;
 - * extending the directory of high quality providers available;
 - * supporting the brokerage of these services on behalf of schools;
- Evaluate the effectiveness to schools of the half-termly review meetings for schools causing serious concern;
- Review the triggers for intervention and ensure that the number of schools identified as needing additional support is manageable;

- Continue to develop a comprehensive and coherent ICT strategy which takes sufficient account of the different ways schools have responded to the NGfL;
- Ensure that chairs of governors receive all reports of visits by advisers;
- Rigorously promote the implementation of the NLS and the NNS in secondary schools to ensure that the progression from Key Stage 2 to 3 is more effective.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

73. There is a strong corporate commitment to greater efficiency and coherence in cross-service work within the local authority. Links are clear between planning documents across the authority and those for education. For example improvements for pupils in the joint children's services plan and in the Portsmouth community plan reflect those in the EDP. The Council has good mechanisms for securing substantial external funding for projects which can benefit education and schools. In this context the effective joint work between the LEA and a range of services for example health, police and social services is growing and benefiting schools and pupils. The partnership with the dioceses is well developed both strategically and at the operational level. Liaison with other agencies is very good.

74. The Council does not have an overarching performance monitoring and review framework, apart from the reporting of statutory performance indicators to committee. However, reasonable steps are taken by officers within the education service to review service purpose and cost. There is a heavy emphasis in such respects on the budget making and review processes. The facility to move savings to fund priority developments provides some encouragement to challenge the existing use of funds. There is a particularly strong commitment to seeking the views of schools and other service users. The Council has been a Best Value pilot authority and has well organised arrangements for the co-ordination and conduct of reviews.

75. Within the LEA and across the City Council, there is a strongly held belief that action is more important than the production of formal, detailed plans. It is evident that this approach is working and that schools benefit from the provision of efficient services, rapid and effective responses from the LEA to particular needs, and the delivery of cross-service projects. The system depends on open relationships and trust in the LEA. Whilst the ethos of the City Council has some benefits, however, it has not prevented ill defined targets and poor monitoring of outcomes in aspects of the LEA's strategic management and school improvement.

Evaluation

76. Arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of the LEA are under-developed. The EDP is consistent and linked to other statutory plans and corporate strategies. Collectively they provide the Council and the education committee with sufficient means of monitoring the work of the LEA in school improvement against defined actions and targets. This should be a key mechanism for holding the education service to account for its actions and impact in schools. This has not been a robust process to date.

77. Members are kept generally informed of developments and financial decisions made by officers through a weekly members information system. A premium is placed on achieving cross-party consensus and depoliticising education. While there is much to celebrate in this approach which is welcomed by schools, members appear less

comfortable with the scrutiny role that is also part of their remit. There is little evidence that members take a robust role in evaluating the performance of the education service or its schools. The education committee meets five times per year, and has no sub-committees. Members are involved in two monitoring groups – the buildings panel and the school standards and improvement group. Whilst the current confidence of members in senior officers may be well placed, there is certainly no room for complacency given the rather inauspicious start made by the LEA in tackling school improvement, and continuing concerns about the declining rates of improvement through key stages 2 to 4. There is little evidence that members are rigorous in holding officers and schools to account and assuring that the Council is providing value for money in terms of education.

78. A more systematic approach has recently been adopted. The CEO has established new and appropriate terms of reference for the school standards and improvement group, on which members, officers, headteachers and teacher associations are represented. Previous arrangements had fallen into abeyance. It is planned that the group will evaluate the impact of the LEA.

Education planning

79. Education planning is satisfactory, despite the turnover in staff and the delayed implementation of the first EDP. The new CEO is providing strong leadership to the education service, his skills and those of many senior staff are effectively rebuilding relationships with schools and the climate for improvement is positive.

80. The strong customer focus of Portsmouth City Council is a major factor in the work of the LEA, in the implementation of the EDP and other plans. Senior officers communicate effectively with schools and consultation is thorough. The joint executive group of officers and headteachers is established as representative of all schools and has a brief for consultation and decision making, for example on the new EDP. This partnership is now giving clear direction to the work of the LEA and schools.

81. Four functional boards have only recently been established, consisting of headteachers, governors, and officers. Their remit is to evaluate the effectiveness of the LEA areas of strategic management, school improvement, special educational needs and access. Members are not involved. The boards will need some, but not excessive, detail of the EDP actions in order to make judgements about effectiveness and impact in the schools.

Management services

82. The LEA has no direct services organisations but offers a full range of client support. Services make full use of the opportunities offered by the LEA's tight geographical area to maintain close, personal contacts with schools. User orientation is strong and the support provided is mainly of high quality. A key outcome is that senior managers and governors in schools are not diverted from their prime task of raising achievement. Marketing information is clear and adequate choice is offered. Buy back rates are high.

83. There is extensive consultation with schools on service planning and review. This includes a wide range of working groups, as well as questionnaire surveys and individual discussions. There is less commitment to the production of detailed action plans for each service, although statements of key objectives and targets, expressed in very general terms, are produced. Reasonable attempts are made by officers to compare service specifications and costs with those in neighbouring LEAs.

84. Support for financial management is good. The accounting and payroll systems meet all basic needs and support for school budget planning and review is good. The notification of delegated budgets is at the end of March, but briefings and discussions earlier in the budget process provide a reasonable indication of the eventual allocations. Appropriate contact is maintained with schools with financial difficulties. Few schools have deficits. The provision of financial benchmarking data is limited and restricted to secondary schools only. However, an interested school governor provides data to primary schools.

85. Support provided by the personnel service is sound and developing. The development of an in-house service has been incremental. Initially schools relied heavily on Hampshire services. The impetus for this development has come from Portsmouth schools, which is testimony in itself to the confidence they have in the head of service and her staff. The manual of guidance is currently being reformatted in response to comments from schools. The manual is supplemented by a termly newsletter. The personnel database does not allow easy analysis of information and this restricts what benchmarking data can be provided for schools.

86. ICT support for school administration is good. Basic hardware and software provision meets key needs, although there is limited facility at present to exchange data electronically with the LEA. All schools are online using the Hampshire package. User support and maintenance provision is good. The helpline service responds promptly and supportively. A newsletter is provided, user groups are run, and there is close involvement of both headteachers and school administrative staff in service planning and review.

87. Support for schools with their building repair and maintenance responsibilities provided by the city engineers department is satisfactory, although communication with schools compares unfavourably with the other management services. Staffing resources and organisation are being adjusted to address the problem. This having been said, the cost of the work commissioned, the quality of that work, and the supervision of projects by surveying staff do not give rise to major complaint from schools. Support in the areas of grounds maintenance, cleaning, and caretaking is also satisfactory, but with a somewhat better client focus.

88. The take-up of school meals is broadly comparable with other LEAs. The service is currently subject to a best value pilot review as part of the preparation for letting a new contract in the summer. Consultation has been broadly based and has included a fundamental review of service purpose, design, and cost. Transport provision for SEN pupils is reliable and reasonably punctual. The SEN transport budget is, rightly, held by the SEN managers, thus ensuring that placement and transport costs are considered together. Liaison with other council departments to ensure that pupils' travel needs are reflected in planning and highways work is good.

Recommendation

- Formalise the procedures for accountability and assessing value for money in education by ensuring that a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating the performance of the LEA is adopted by members, officers and schools.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

89. The LEA has worked hard to foster a spirit of corporate responsibility for pupils with special educational needs. Statutory duties are met. The management and delivery of support for pupils with special educational needs are considerable strengths of the LEA. There are clear criteria for the identification and assessment of need, there is vigorous moderation which ensures consistency of judgements across the LEA, and resources are targeted accurately to meet the needs identified. Many schools have well managed SEN provision with skilled assistants who provide valuable support to a range of pupils with widely differing needs. Relationships with social services, health and external agencies are effective.

90. There are effective consultation and discussions with schools, parents, voluntary associations and other agencies about the strategies for managing provision and services to meet a range of needs. These are gradually raising awareness of how mainstream schools can become more inclusive and how the best skills of the special school staff can help them achieve this goal. Nevertheless, there is some anxiety among special schools about their future role.

91. Portsmouth decided not to pursue a full SEN review on transition from Hampshire, despite the fact that the City had inherited a high number of special school places. This was partly to foster a collegiate approach to planning for SEN between officers and schools, but also to enable the LEA to prepare an agenda for action having taken into account national and local priorities. A greater proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs in Portsmouth are educated in special than in mainstream schools, compared to statistical neighbours or national average. The LEA plans to implement its strategy on inclusion following consultation in Summer 2000.

92. Transition to key stages 3 and 4 is problematic for some pupils with special educational needs who are educated in resourced units attached to primary schools in Portsmouth. The LEA has no secondary resourced provision for pupils with low incidence SENs. Termly regional planning with Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council ensures that pupils have access to resourced regional provision in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with hearing impairment (oral/aural), deaf signing, visual impairment and physical disability. Transport is provided. There is no accessible regional provision for secondary pupils with a language disorder/impairment. Audit funding for all pupils with a low incidence need is topped up by the LEA to ensure an appropriate level of support. The LEA has worked productively with, for example, the Dyslexia Institute to provide support for six secondary aged pupils with specific learning difficulties. Two of its newer secondary schools will have disabled access and one will be acoustically treated to provide a more suitable environment for those with hearing impairment. The more vexed question of provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools remains unresolved.

93. Nevertheless, much progress has been made in a relatively short time. A number of initiatives have been taken and some creative projects have been developed across the City. Key strengths of the LEA's approach include:

- The SEN inspection cycle is now embedded within the school improvement service. There is an established protocol for monitoring SEN provision in schools which involves close collaboration between the head of pupil support services, the educational psychology service and the SEN inspector. A thorough procedure for reporting the outcomes of monitoring visits to headteachers and their chairs of governors, as well as to the education committee annually, has been established.
- A recently developed framework for guiding quality assurance visits to out of City special schools is providing a suitable standardised format for officers involved in this work.
- The work patterns of the educational psychology service have been redefined resulting in a more productive and creative use of educational psychologists time. No longer are they caught up on the statutory process for assessing individual pupils. Although still contributing to it, they do not gatekeep or manage the process. Their time is allocated on a formula based on SEN audits in each individual school. Service level agreements are drawn up with schools which govern how EPs time will be used.
- The EPS, whilst retaining its own identity, works successfully as part of a multi-professional group with teacher advisers and the joint school and family support team (social services) on projects such as providing training for those who support pupils with language disorders. Projects are based on action research and outcomes so far have been good. The quality of this service is evidenced in the £18,000 which is generated from schools buying in additional training time.
- Considerable investment has been made in training SENCOs and Learning Support Assistants.

94. The LEA reached a 95 per cent 18 week completion rate in the period 1998/99, which is excellent. Primary schools are positive about the quality of statements, secondary schools less so. There is general acknowledgement that the procedures for annual review have improved and the presence of LEA officers at transitional reviews and those where some exceptional arrangements have been made, has been welcomed.

95. Multi-agency joint working has been effectively established. Relationships with social services are very good at a strategic level and there is evidence that this is improving practice on the ground in schools to the benefit of vulnerable children. Initiatives such as the establishment of a panel to plan strategies for supporting young people in public care and the drive to prepare personal education plans for these young people have been fully endorsed by elected members.

96. Links with health are improving. Notable features include: the attendance of key health managers at the headteachers' conference; the preparation of a draft protocol for therapist input; and the 15 days which have been given for an educational psychologist to work alongside colleagues in the child and adolescent mental health service. The latter initiative involves input to a parents' group concerned with the management of children with attention deficit hyperactivity

disorder, as well as working with teachers on matters relating to effective classroom management techniques and strategies for such pupils.

Recommendation

- Continue to implement the SEN strategy, and ensure that transition from Key Stage 2 to key stages 3 and 4 for pupils with a range of special educational needs, including emotional, behaviour and learning difficulties, is assured.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

97. The supply of school places has been very well handled by the LEA. Portsmouth was faced in 1997/98 with an immediate crisis in terms of secondary school provision. Only late in the 11+ transfer process was it clear that a barely sufficient number of places would be available for all who needed them, and there was the certain prospect that rolls would rise in subsequent years. The action taken by the LEA to address this problem was prompt and effective. DfEE approval of a PFI scheme to provide a new school was secured in February 1998. The new school opened for Year 7 pupils (in good quality temporary accommodation) in September 1999. It will transfer to newly built premises in September 2000. Managing such a major project within this timescale was an outstanding piece of work. The head and governors of the new school were complimentary both about the facilities to be provided and the collaborative, supportive approach of the LEA throughout.

98. The percentage of surplus places in the LEA's primary schools is below the average for unitary authorities. Progress on reducing Key Stage 1 class sizes is ahead of schedule and the LEA is likely to meet the September 2001 target a year early. The LEA's forecasting of school rolls overall has been good. Liaison with relevant agencies, and schools in particular, is thorough.

99. The School Organisation Plan was agreed following appropriate consultation. The Plan requires some further development to meet DfEE guidance in full, particularly in respect of SEN, post 16 provision, and community use. This having been said, it fulfils the main requirement to compare the projected need for places in primary and secondary schools with the available provision and to indicate what adjustments in provision are proposed to be made.

Admissions

100. Admission arrangements for both primary and secondary schools are well managed. Secondary school catchment areas have recently been introduced to complement the increase in provision and have done much to allay parental concerns. The number of secondary appeals has been significantly reduced. The secondary transfer process is well coordinated and the timetable meets best practice guidelines in most respects. The admissions booklet for parents is well presented and widely circulated.

101. Arrangements for the transfer to mainstream secondary schools of children with SEN statements are generally well designed to support inclusion. The LEA organises a liaison meeting for primary and secondary SENCOs during the summer term to ensure a smooth hand-over of information and documentation.

Asset management

102. Good progress has been made with the development of the LEA's Asset Management Plan (AMP). Full condition surveys have been conducted of all school

buildings, capacity data is up to date, and suitability assessments have been carried out. Meetings have been held with each school to discuss current and future needs. These have built on the programme of annual meetings between nominated surveyor and school representatives to review repair and maintenance requirements. Such opportunities to meet face to face to discuss all site and building issues are well appreciated by schools. The condition surveys are generally felt to be both accurate and helpful to schools in planning their own maintenance programmes.

103. A working group with headteacher representatives has advised both on the AMP process and the deployment of available capital and revenue resources. A panel of members has kept the planning process and the management of building projects under close review.

104. In 1998/99 revenue spending on repairs and maintenance was above the average for unitary authorities. The proportion of the budget spent on planned rather than reactive maintenance was well above the recommended level. Capital spending has fluctuated widely from year to year because of necessary commitments to expanding provision. Nonetheless, there has been investment in improving existing premises. The LEA's estimate is that the backlog of work is slowly reducing, although there are significant needs to be addressed in the secondary sector in particular. The LEA has been active in investigating alternative means of funding its repair and improvement needs and commissioning the work required.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

105. The LEA takes reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory duties with regard to health, safety, welfare and child protection matters. Links with health and social services are good. Training for all schools about child protection procedures and protocols is provided by social services and education. A concern raised by headteachers at the lack of feedback after reporting concerns about individual pupils to social services is in the process of being addressed through the identification of cluster social workers who will become the named point of contact.

106. All schools have a health and safety policy. There is a service level agreement with the City's health and safety executive to provide advice on all matters relating to the health and welfare of pupils which is operating successfully.

Young People in Public Care (formerly looked-after children)

107. Provision for young people in public care in Portsmouth is very good. Social workers notify the database manager when a young person enters public care and schools are similarly alerted. Social workers liaise with named YPPC liaison officers, for the purpose of devising personal education plans for each young person. Although this latter system is not fully established, the framework for managing the needs of those in care is in place. For the 20 per cent who may at any one time have exceptional needs, a panel for YPPC and Young Offenders has been formed, which, with the additional resources at its command, is able to put together creative packages which may continue after the young person has left school.

108. Good progress has been made in developing a unified and comprehensive approach to monitoring the progress of young people looked after by the local authority. There are some 247 such children, of whom 123 are currently on the rolls of Portsmouth schools. A detailed database has been established in cooperation with the schools and it is complete but for attainment data for pupils placed outside the LEA. An officer has been appointed jointly with social services to remedy this. Together with social services, an individual education plan has been developed for each young person. A multi-agency panel has been set up to ensure best value, allocate funds and avoid the duplication of functions. A successful bid for £350,000 from the Gatsby Project will facilitate further developments.

Attendance

109. Attendance rates are below the national averages in primary and secondary schools. The measures taken to promote and enforce attendance are good and the majority of schools feel well supported. There has been a steady improvement in attendance in primary schools since the LEA was established and a very marked improvement in secondary schools, with an equally significant reduction in unauthorised absence. This achievement is the result of a thorough analysis of the attendance data and accurate targeting of resources. The education welfare service (EWS) has been reorganised, with educational welfare officers' (EWOs') time allocated fairly according to a needs-led formula. Six schools have been given the additional support of educational welfare assistants who are readily available to respond immediately when pupils are absent without proper reason. They have also helped schools to deal effectively with moderate attendance problems, susceptible to resolution, which might otherwise be neglected in favour of more serious cases. EWOs are specially assigned where individual pupils are most at risk. The attendance of students in the work placements and college courses associated with inclusion projects is monitored rigorously. The police service works very closely with the LEA in tackling truancy and promoting good attendance among pupils.

Provision of Education Other Than At School

110. There are satisfactory arrangements for monitoring the provision for pupils educated otherwise. The educational welfare service maintains a comprehensive register of pupils educated at home and visits them at least once per year. It liaises closely with the SIS and inspection visits are typically made bi-annually.

111. Students at Key Stages 3 and 4 who are on a school roll but are not able to attend in the normal way are well-catered for by the Sevenoaks Centre PRU. These include pregnant and parent students, and those with psychological or medical conditions. Where possible the students are taught at the Centre where there is a range of courses which are tailored to individual requirements. Training is provided for hospital tutors and there are regular meetings for home tutors. The centre includes a base for them, equipped with computers and resources. The Centre also has the task of monitoring hospital placements and organising tuition at home. Some students require a variety of off-site placements and the Centre holds records and keeps track of their movements.

Behaviour support

112. The LEA's support for behaviour management is good. There is a sound Behaviour Support Plan, based on a detailed analysis of needs and setting out a range of practical measures and clear targets. The schools visited generally speak well of the help received from educational psychologists, the behaviour support staff within pupils services and the outreach teachers based at the Key Stage 3 PRU. This takes the form of staff training, advice on school policies and on techniques for managing behaviour at the level of the individual pupils, the class and the whole school.

113. Exclusions were high but are declining. The officers report that permanent exclusions have been reduced from 130 three years ago to 40 last year which is a considerable achievement. Among the many successful measures taken are a protocol agreed with secondary schools to prevent an undue number of excluded pupils being located at a few schools in more disadvantaged locations and several special projects aimed particularly at pupils excluded or at risk of exclusion. The facilities and curricular provision at the Key Stage 4 PRU have been radically improved. Good progress is being made in the reintegration programme, particularly at Key Stage 3.

114. The strong leadership of pupil services ensures that there is coherence and a clear common purpose. Schools greatly value the quick response and problem solving approach of the senior staff. Nevertheless, the structure of the support mechanisms is complicated and partly dependent on a variety of finite funding sources.

Support for minority ethnic pupils

115. Support for pupils from minority ethnic groups, with English as an Additional Language (EAL), is very good and well regarded by schools. The transition from Section 11 to the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) has been well managed. The EMTAG Action Plan is a sensible, well-conceived document which clearly identifies needs and appropriate strategies. Currently 6.9 per cent of the school population comprise the target group for EMTAG support; of whom 3.7 per cent are bilingual learners. Support to schools is provided via a service level agreement and is directed to those pupils underachieving against National Curriculum age-related norms, where language is considered a factor. The service has secured additional Single Regeneration Budget funding to support an Early Years and a Home-School community project. The service buys in additional curriculum development support from Hampshire's intercultural adviser who acts as an internal consultant to the LEA. Some good dual language materials to support the literacy hour have been produced.

116. The bi-lingual support service (BLSS), provides teachers and bilingual assistants to support pupils with English as an additional language. It also offers to translate documents and attend meetings in schools where parents require oral translation. BLSS is universally praised by the schools using it and, when funds were delegated under EMAG, all opted to buy-back the support. Prior to April 1999,

the BLSS was located within the SIS, but is now part of pupil services. Good progress has been made in supporting bilingual children with learning difficulties.

117. There are currently no Travellers' children in Portsmouth schools but there are standing arrangements with Hampshire LEA to make expertise available should it be required.

School improvement

118. Pupil services make a significant contribution to school improvement in Portsmouth LEA.

Measures taken to combat social exclusion

119. The LEA has a range of imaginative initiatives to combat social exclusion. The Council is keenly aware of those of its schools which serve the most socially and economically deprived communities and directs a high proportion of its services towards them. Project Warrior and other special projects run within pupils services aim to ensure that pupils at risk in these schools remain within the education system. Motivation is provided by, for instance, work experience programmes and part-time courses with vocational content. Basic skills are reinforced and mentors are assigned to individuals. Small group work and personal counselling are provided. The projects are facilitated by the close cooperation with FE colleges, the careers service, the business partnership and other local organisations.

Responses to the Macpherson report

120. The Council is reviewing its practice in tackling racism in response to the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. Progress is generally good. Since April 1999, each Council service has allocated a member of staff to take the lead as the service equality officer (SEO). The SEOs form an interdepartmental team chaired by the Council's equality adviser. The LEA has recently updated its Equal Opportunities policy to meet the Commission for Racial Equality's standards. Racial incidents in schools are reported to the Council annually. Plans are in hand to update the LEA's racial harassment guidance in conjunction with a small group of headteachers. This will be launched in September 2000.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve attendance levels and reduce the exclusion rates in schools;
- Produce a long term behaviour management strategy in consultation with schools and other stakeholders.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

- Implement an action plan for the school improvement service which explains how the priorities of the revised EDP will be actioned, and includes performance management systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact on school improvement.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

- Secure the appointments, training and development for staff in the school improvement service, which will provide schools with robust monitoring in order to support more effective self-review;
- Review, in consultation with schools, the guidance and training for officers, governors and headteachers on analysing and using performance data to set targets to raise standards. This should build on the good practice in assessment that already exists in a number of Portsmouth schools;
- Strengthen the training opportunities for all staff by:
 - * publishing an annual programme of courses for schools;
 - * extending the directory of high quality providers available;
 - * supporting the brokerage of these services on behalf of schools;
- Evaluate the effectiveness to schools of the half-termly review meetings for schools causing serious concern;
- Review the triggers for intervention and ensure that the number of schools identified as needing additional support is manageable;
- Continue to develop a comprehensive and coherent ICT strategy which takes sufficient account of the different ways schools have responded to the NGfL;
- Ensure that chairs of governors receive all reports of visits by advisers;
- Rigorously promote the implementation of the NLS and the NNS in secondary schools and ensure that the progression from Key Stage 2 to 3 is more effective.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- Formalise the procedures for accountability and assessing value for money in education by ensuring that a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating the performance of the LEA is adopted by members, officers and schools.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- Continue to implement the SEN strategy, and ensure that transition from Key Stage 2 to key stages 3 and 4 for pupils with a range of special educational needs, including emotional, behaviour and learning difficulties, is assured.

ACCESS

- Continue to improve attendance levels and reduce the exclusion rates in schools;
- Produce a long term behaviour management strategy in consultation with schools and other stakeholders.

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Portsmouth City Council
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A copy of the report can also be obtained on the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk