



Office for Standards
in Education

Nottingham City

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: January 2004

Reporting Inspector: Brian Blake HMI



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Contents	Page
Basic information	
Summary	5
Introduction	5
Main findings	6
Recommendations	7
Section 1: Corporate leadership of education	8
Summary table of judgements	8
Corporate planning for education and its implementation	8
Targeting of resources	9
Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	10
Leadership by elected members and advice given to them	10
Leadership by senior officers	11
Strategic partnerships	11
Support for 14-19 education	11
The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	12
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation	13
Summary table of judgements	13
The strategy for school improvement and its implementation	13
Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools	14
Supply and quality of teachers	14
Provision of school places	15

Admissions to schools	15
Section 3: Support to improve education in schools	17
Summary table of judgements	17
Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement	17
Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2	18
Support for information and communication technology (ICT)	19
Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3	19
Support for gifted and talented pupils	20
Support for school governors	20
Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management	21
Financial services	21
Personnel services	22
Property services	22
Information management	22
The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	23
Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)	25
Summary table of judgements	25
The strategy for SEN	25
Statutory obligations	26
SEN functions to support school improvement	26

Value for money	27
Section 5: Support for social inclusion	28
Summary table of judgements	28
The LEA's strategy for social inclusion	28
Provision for pupils educated other than at school	29
Support for attendance	29
Support for behaviour	30
Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	31
Provision for looked after children	31
Promoting racial equality	32
Appendix A: Record of Judgement Recording Statements	33
Appendix B	37
Context of the inspection	37
Context of the LEA	39
The performance of schools	40
Funding data for the LEA	42

Basic information

Name of LEA:	Nottingham City Local Education Authority
LEA number:	892
Address of LEA:	The Sandfield Centre Sandfield Road Lenton Nottingham NG7 1QH
Reporting Inspector:	Brian Blake HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2004

Summary

Introduction

Nottingham City is seen by many as a vibrant and lively place to live and work. However, it is also a city with significant deprivation, with over half its wards among the most deprived areas in the country. Unemployment is higher than the national average and there is a higher percentage of adults and children from minority ethnic groups. These factors present challenges to the council, schools and teachers, but also make Nottingham a city rich in cultural diversity.

With the exception of some higher level attainment at Key Stage 3 English, standards of attainment remain well below the national averages at all key stages. The gap between the LEA's performance and standards nationally and in statistical neighbours¹ are still too great. The performance of some pupils from minority ethnic groups is also a cause for concern, as it is nationally.

There have been some significant changes within both the council and the education department since the previous inspection. The leader of the council and the portfolio holder for education have switched responsibilities. There are a new chief executive and corporate director of education. There has been a restructuring of the education department, with the replacement of some senior managers with new appointments and redefined roles for some existing staff.

¹ Nottingham City LEA's statistical neighbours are: Middlesbrough, City of Kingston upon Hull, Greenwich, Rochdale, Salford, Oldham, Sandwell, Halton, Liverpool and City of Derby

Main findings

Summary: Nottingham City has a good local education authority (LEA), which is making improvements in the majority of its services to schools. The LEA's strategy for education is focused clearly on tackling pupils' low levels of performance across all key stages. Some very difficult decisions have been taken, including restructuring of the education department and some closures and reorganisation of schools, to address the key issues arising from the previous inspection and to achieve the council's major priority of raising educational attainment. The LEA is responding well to some weaknesses in the implementation of the improvement strategy and to the slow progress in improving levels of performance, which remain well below those found nationally or in comparable LEAs across all key stages. Overall, however, its progress since the previous inspection is highly satisfactory. The strengths of the LEA lie in its rigorous leadership, its awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, its pragmatic approach to improvement, and its willingness to act decisively. This has brought about a shared sense of purpose and consensus view about the action and support needed to make improvements. These features indicate that the LEA has good capacity for further improvement.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation of education objectives and leadership by councillors • Strong leadership by officers • Strong strategic partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme for Best Value reviews
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The coherence and focus of major plans on school improvement • High levels of challenge to schools • School place planning, especially at secondary level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rate of improvement in pupils' performance across all key stages
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good emphasis on schools' capacity to improve themselves • The LEA knows its schools well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clear and robust value for money procedures
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear and effective strategy for inclusive special educational need (SEN) provision • Firm commitment to inclusion, backed by good plans and use of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The specificity of objectives in statements • The cost-effectiveness of SEN funding and its links to pupils' progress
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared understanding and drive towards social inclusion • Good activities focusing on particularly vulnerable groups, making good use of additional resources and use of partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to meet required full-time provision for excluded pupils

Recommendations

Key recommendations

Value for money: the education directorate should improve procedures for assessing the value provided by each of its services, using benchmarking against comparable authorities, and review provision where necessary.

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

Targeting resources: agree an appropriate set of priority issues for the Schools Forum to consider, and ensure that all options put to the forum are supported by detailed financial models.

Continuous improvement: ensure that the future programme for Best Value reviews that addresses key areas of relevance to education and leads to improvement plans that will impact on educational outcomes.

Strategy for education and its implementation

Support to improve education in schools

Support for Key Stage 3: improve the consistency of plans for support to schools, ensuring that consultants' work can be evaluated effectively.

Support for special educational needs

Statutory obligations: increase the precision of objectives in statements of SEN, and improve the system for annual reviews to ensure that the objectives and descriptions of needs reviewed each year are appropriately updated and improve the mechanisms for informing parents about the partnership service.

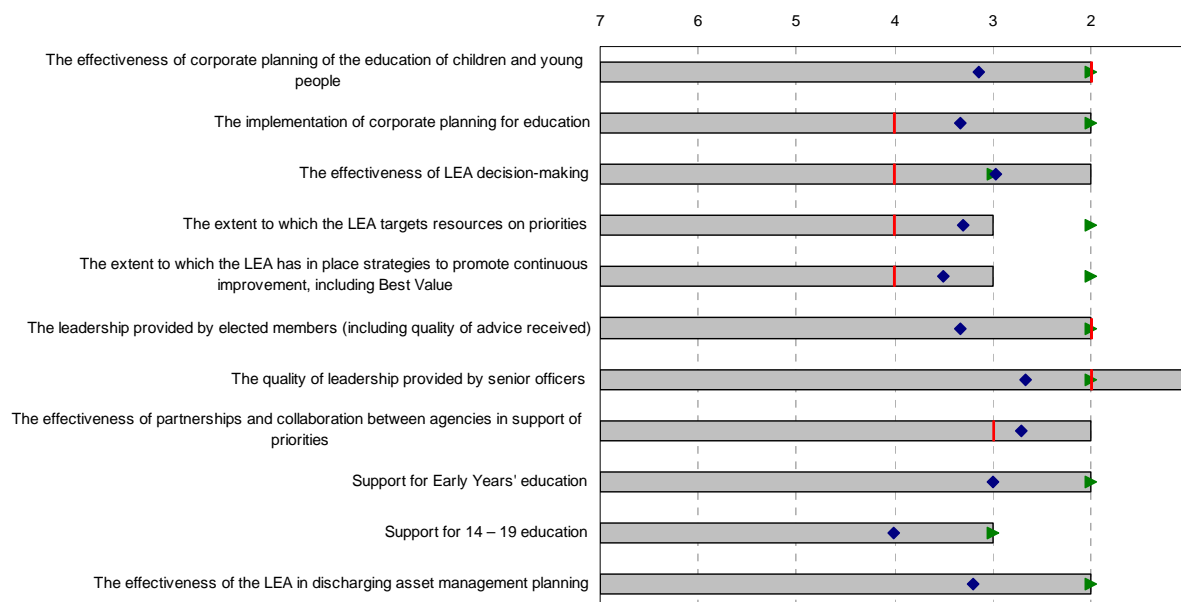
Value for money: extend the financial monitoring exercise to cover all schools, and use the findings, together with more systematic evaluation of school effectiveness, in a fundamental review of SEN funding mechanisms and their link to pupils' progress.

Support for social inclusion

Looked after children: ensure that every child has a personal education plan.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. In the previous inspection, corporate planning was good and its implementation satisfactory. They are now both good. The progress made by the LEA in corporate planning has been accompanied by changes of senior staff and of councillors' responsibilities. Close working links, which focus on an agreed agenda for improvement, have been firmly established between councillors and senior officers. The recently approved strategic plan makes the council's priorities very clear, including its top priority of raising educational attainment. The plan is well argued and linked clearly to the aspirations of the council across a number of areas including crime, health, employment and housing. Links with other plans, especially the Education Development Plan (EDP) and the community strategy, are clear. The outcome is that the place and value of education, as the number one council priority, are now rooted firmly in the minds of councillors, officers and schools.

2. Activities to implement the priorities are clear and well supported by the corporate framework for performance management. Collaborative and partnership work have also been used very effectively to support the LEA's drive to improve its provision. The targeting of resources to priorities is beginning to ensure that identified activities, including local and national initiatives, are sufficiently well funded and will be sustainable. More needs to be done, however, to implement Best Value.

3. Although the corporate planning for education gives a clear view and vision for Nottingham City, the key element that makes it work in practice is the leadership of senior officers and councillors. If plans alone were the answer, the LEA would already be seeing significant improvements. However, the targets originally agreed with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) are very ambitious and will require substantial increases in the majority of end of key stage tests and examinations. However, recently agreed changes with the DfES for Key Stage 2 now make the 2004 and 2005 targets more realisable. Officers and councillors know that dedicated and focused hard work is also needed to put good ideas into practice. This is already happening, and the capacity of senior officers and councillors to deliver further improvements is very good. Schools readily appreciate that the combination of good planning and decisive action by the council is making small, but important, progress in improving the overall provision within the LEA.

Targeting of resources

4. The council has improved since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory in this aspect. The education service in Nottingham has been prioritised by elected members and resources have been steadily increased. For 2003-04, education is being funded at 5% above the education Formula Spending Share. Schools are very conscious of, and value, the clear support of the council. As a result of this support they benefit from improved and higher than average delegated sums. In addition, the LEA has been very successful in accessing significant amounts of grant-related funding to support its stated priorities.

5. The growth in budgets has, however, masked some areas where, until recently, insufficient progress had been made. The council did not have corporate or departmental medium-term financial plans or high-quality financial analyses. School budgets had to be reissued last year due to errors in the pupil number count, but the LEA responded decisively and brought in an interim manager to rescue both the situation and to help draw up a specification for a new strategic financial manager. Financial information for both schools and the department has improved significantly, as have procedures to prevent previous shortcomings. Although still in its early stages, work has begun to assess the value for money of initiatives as an essential prelude to critical decisions when grant funding ends. However, processes to ensure that service managers can demonstrate value for money across all areas of school and centrally held budgets are underdeveloped

6. School budgets are generally in good shape. Balances are routinely and properly challenged. Deficits are identified, although not always as early as they should be, and sound recovery arrangements are put in place. The funding formula distributes resources sensitively to need, and is reviewed by a headteachers' reference group that has also done some sound work on the distribution of extra resources. The Schools Forum has begun to inform policy, but the level of debate has been somewhat constrained by insufficient data and a lack of prioritisation of issues.

Recommendation

- Agree an appropriate set of priority issues for the Schools Forum to consider; and ensure that all options put to the forum are supported by detailed financial models.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

7. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection, and this aspect of the LEA's work is now highly satisfactory. There are now good features in the council's approach, but significant weaknesses remain in Best Value initiatives. A rigorous approach to self-evaluation, including the active involvement of schools and other partners, has been developed within the education department. This has enabled the authority to make a well-founded evaluation of its action plan, following the previous inspection, and to identify areas for further improvement.

8. The corporate framework for performance management is developing well, following criticism in the 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspection. Monitoring arrangements have been improved and council-wide arrangements for individual performance development and review are linked well to planning. Senior managers in the education department show a firm commitment to continuous improvement, and are well supported by other officers. Progress in detailed action plans is monitored systematically, including reviews of key performance indicators. Nevertheless, targets set in these plans are sometimes unrealistic, which limits accountability and rigorous evaluation.

9. The Best Value Performance Plan for 2003-04 meets all statutory requirements, but the council's approach to Best Value in education remains flawed. Two thematic Best Value reviews, with considerable educational implications, have taken place since the previous inspection. Neither has led to new plans that will produce improved educational outcomes. The council is aware of this weakness and is planning to undertake a fundamental review of Best Value plans and methodology in early 2004. Although schools are now required to agree annually a Best Value statement, the procedure lacks rigour. More needs to be done, particularly with governing bodies, to secure clearer understanding and application of the principles of Best Value.

Recommendation

- Ensure that the future programme for Best Value reviews addresses key areas of relevance to education and leads to improvement plans that will impact on educational outcomes.

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

10. This area was good in the previous inspection and it remains so. Councillors and officers have good working relationships, underpinned by a shared sense of purpose about the major priority of raising educational standards. This priority is well understood by councillors from all major political parties. The leader of the council and portfolio holder for education work effectively with senior officers, from whom good quality information and advice are received. Regular meetings ensure that those lead councillors receive updates on progress against the priorities identified in major plans, including the EDP.

11. There are regular performance management reviews by the leader and the corporate director for education, together with the portfolio holder, on education's work programme, which ensure that the emphasis on raising standards remains a high priority. All of these factors help contribute to the very positive view from schools about the effective leadership

provided by councillors. The role of scrutiny within the council has developed since the previous inspection. There is now a children and young people's standing panel, which has a specific responsibility for scrutiny of all services to children, including education. This is a very timely move.

Leadership by senior officers

12. This area was good in the previous inspection. It is now very good. The key to this very effective leadership is that all senior officers, led very effectively by the corporate director for education, are clear that the focus of their work with schools is to raise standards achieved by all pupils. Priorities are shared with and well known by headteachers and governors, who are very supportive of the LEA's improvement strategy.

13. The impact of this improvement strategy is being felt not only in schools, many of which are facing challenging times, including possible closure or reorganisation, but also in the education department. Difficult staffing decisions have been taken to ensure that all LEA officers are up to the task of rigorously monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools where necessary. This has led to the replacement of some managers and the reorganisation of existing staff. This strategy has been very successful.

Strategic partnerships

14. The LEA's support for partnership work and for collaboration with different agencies has improved and is now good. The key reason for its improved success is the LEA's recognition of the importance of collaborative work in order to achieve its corporate priority to raise standards. An assistant director has been appointed to take responsibility for formalising partnership structures and processes and evaluating the effectiveness of different partnership arrangements. A council education partnership group also links effectively with a range of independent organisations working together to support the LEA's broad education priorities and the council's overall community aims, including targeting families and supporting initiatives that help to reduce crime.

15. Overall, the LEA is doing everything it reasonably can to ensure that this work is effective, especially with key partners such as the health authority, social services and the police. The safer schools partnership, which is focused on reducing youth crime while improving the quality of education and raising standards, is creating a better understanding of the respective roles of the local police and LEA in tackling cross-cutting social issues. Some productive work is being undertaken between education and social services, particularly in child protection and support for behaviour. Well-developed strategic links with the health service have resulted in improved service delivery for speech and language therapy and mental health.

Support for 14-19 education

16. The LEA's support for 14-19 education is highly satisfactory. The authority leads the Greater Nottingham 14-19 strategic partnership jointly with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and another LEA. It has identified 14-19 education as a significant priority for development; this forms an important part of the EDP, and progress is monitored regularly by

the portfolio-holder, as well as through the department's internal processes. Two groups of officers work in collaboration; one concerned with curriculum development, and the other with partnerships with other agencies. Their work is well integrated, and the overall effect is that the LEA is providing a strong steer and good support to schools in their developments. The LEA has also linked its own 14-19 strategy into a range of other plans, such as its asset management strategy, and the work of the 14-19 teams is well integrated with that of the secondary advisers. The authority is also contributing well to the local Learning and Skills Council action plan.

17. Significant steps forward have already been made in diversifying the Key Stage 4 curriculum, and in engaging schools with colleges and work-based training providers. New courses and systems of accreditation are available through pilot work in certain schools, providing useful opportunities for pupils likely to have difficulty in tackling a full range of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs), and new provision involving training providers is underway. The proportion of 16 year-old school leavers not involved in employment, education or training has recently reduced and the uptake of work-related courses at Key Stage 4 is increasing.

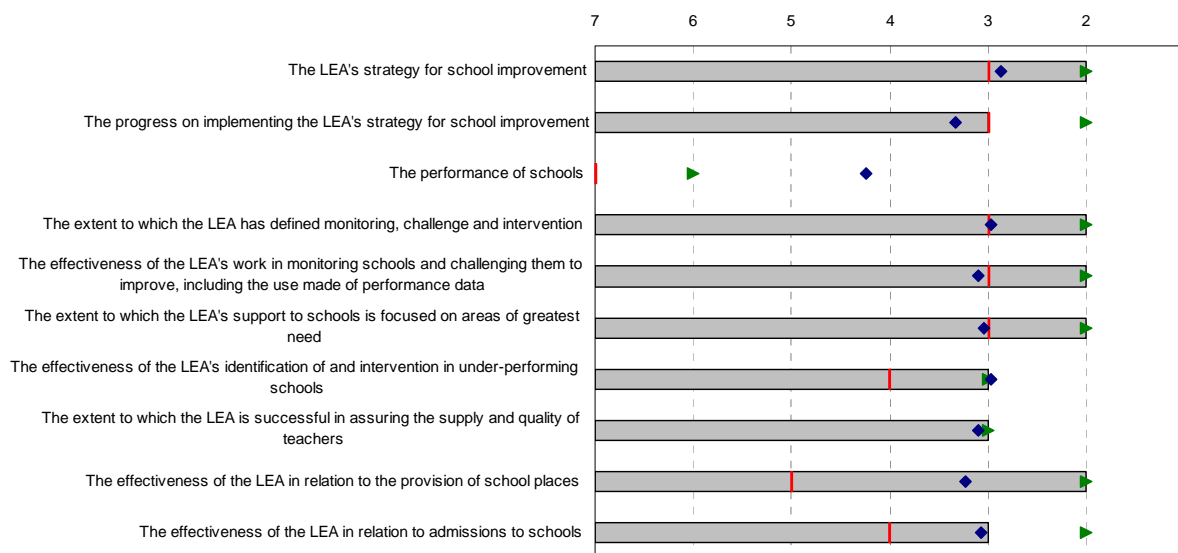
The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning

18. The LEA is good in this aspect of its work. Efficiently gathered data and good plans, together with significant increases in investment, are having a significant impact. In the last three years, £7 million has been spent on the most important maintenance items, and the number of unsuitable teaching areas has been reduced. However, much more needs to be done to improve school buildings if the council is to meet its challenging achievement targets. Resources have been increased from £3 million in 1998 to £23 million this year, with sound plans for the future. A 'Building Schools for the Future' bid will, if successful, provide the necessary resources to complete an ambitious programme of reform of school buildings. The reliance on the bid does, however, leave the plan vulnerable until it is secured.

19. The success of the LEA's work is based securely on its customer focus, and its declared aim to improve the learning environment for pupils and staff. This has been rightly recognised by schools, especially secondaries. Schools have access to good comparative data, and the LEA is helping them to develop their own asset management skills. An on-line tutorial package is helping to ensure that schools have their own asset management plan, closely allied to that of the LEA. The package of support is completed by a rolling programme of visits by property professionals to agree a medium-term asset management plan for each school, checking to ensure that the school and the LEA are meeting their respective duties. The impact on morale in schools is evident, and some early analyses are showing that improvements in some pupils' attainment are linked specifically to property improvements.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



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The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

20. The strategy has developed well since the previous inspection and is now good. It centres on the EDP 2002-2007. It provides a secure and clearly articulated basis for work with schools and partners. The LEA has succeeded in bringing together a range of initiatives, including Excellence in Cities (EiC), the national strategies for primary education and Key Stage 3, and its 'transforming secondary education' (TSE) project involving all secondary schools and external partners, including another LEA, to support work on the EDP priorities. Together with the recently agreed policy for identifying and supporting schools causing concern and the strategy for SEN and inclusion, the EDP provides a coherent approach to the issues of school improvement.

21. However, although there are some good features in the implementation of the strategy, there have been only limited advances in pupils' performance, and the LEA has not yet achieved enough success in securing improvement in the quality of some secondary schools. Despite the consistent and determined leadership of senior officers there is, as yet, no compelling evidence to suggest that the current rate of improvement will be increased. While there have been some substantial improvements in pupils' attainment since the LEA was formed in 1998, progress has slowed since the previous inspection. Outcomes at the end of each key stage remain well below national averages and usually below or well below those of comparable LEAs. Overall performance by pupils is, therefore, very poor. The targets for 2002 and 2003 were not met, and there would have to be very dramatic improvements across all key stages for the 2004 targets to be met. Despite the best efforts of the LEA, the majority

of targets originally agreed with the DFES are not likely to be achieved within the identified timescales, including the local public service agreement targets. However, recently agreed changes with the DfES for Key Stage 2 now make the 2004 and 2005 targets more realisable. The LEA is also well short of achieving the Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 neighbourhood renewal floor targets, but it is making some headway towards the target for five or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 2004. Individual schools' targets are realistically challenging, but there are very substantial gaps between the LEA's targets and the aggregated schools' targets.

22. Other aspects of the LEA's strategic planning for school improvement are also highly satisfactory or better. Its work in the planning of school places is good and highly satisfactory in assuring the supply and quality of teachers. There has been substantial progress in the reduction of surplus secondary places, and a systematic review of the primary phase has now started. Processes for admissions to schools have also improved and are now highly satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools

23. This function is highly satisfactory, and the authority is well placed to improve further. After a period of slow progress, the restructuring of senior management within the education department has led to substantial improvements. The LEA is unlikely to reach its ambitious target of having no schools requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses by the end of 2004, but it has already achieved a substantial reduction in their number over a short period.

24. A good system was introduced in 2003 to identify schools causing concern to the LEA, and to review their progress. Earlier procedures had not worked perfectly, and the judgements on poor performance, which were made by some of Ofsted's school inspections, had not been expected. The majority of plans for intervention in identified schools contain focused actions and precise success criteria, along with rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures. The LEA makes good use of successful schools to work in partnership with those which are underperforming, and also uses its powers of intervention effectively.

Supply and quality of teachers

25. This area is highly satisfactory. Although the LEA generally has a higher number of teacher vacancies than the national average, it is normally successful in filling all vacant posts. This is due to a combination of factors. There is a clear strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers, which is well supported by a range of suitable data about the teaching workforce. This enables targeted LEA support to be provided to schools with particular needs and to tackle issues of vacant posts in key subject areas.

26. New entrants to teaching see Nottingham City as a good place to live and work, which means that the LEA is able to recruit a significant number of newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) to its schools. The LEA has also involved itself, enthusiastically, in a range of suitable initiatives that have helped teachers when joining schools in Nottingham City. For example, the council is pursuing key worker accommodation on new estates in the city that

are suitable as starter homes. The LEA supports well the professional development needs of its teachers, including NQTs, middle managers and senior staff.

Provision of school places

27. Having inherited one of the worst surplus place positions in the country, the LEA has made very significant progress and its school place planning is now good. The school organisation plan is a well written document, which sets out an agreed set of values and principles upon which plans are founded. The school organisation committee is properly constituted, is well supported by officers, and acts in an independent and very professional manner.

28. The reduction in surplus places in secondary schools from almost 30% to 7% is in itself impressive, and illustrates that officers and members have not pulled back from taking difficult decisions to close or merge schools. These decisions have been made against agreed principles of increased community use, securing viability and improving standards, exemplified by the bold decision to merge a poorly performing community school with the City Technology College to establish a city academy.

29. There remain significant surplus places and inappropriate provision in primary and special schools, which the LEA is now beginning to address. It has drawn up and consulted widely on ambitious plans for primary school provision. The scale of the task is considerable, since there is currently a high surplus capacity, with a significant further reduction in pupil numbers projected over the next three years. However, the LEA's track record, political will, schools' enthusiasm, and professional expertise suggest that the target to complete this across the city within four years is realistic. An equally good strategy has been developed and agreed for the restructuring of special school provision across the city. This is linked well to the overall SEN, inclusion and behaviour strategies, and again has the full support of schools.

Admissions to schools

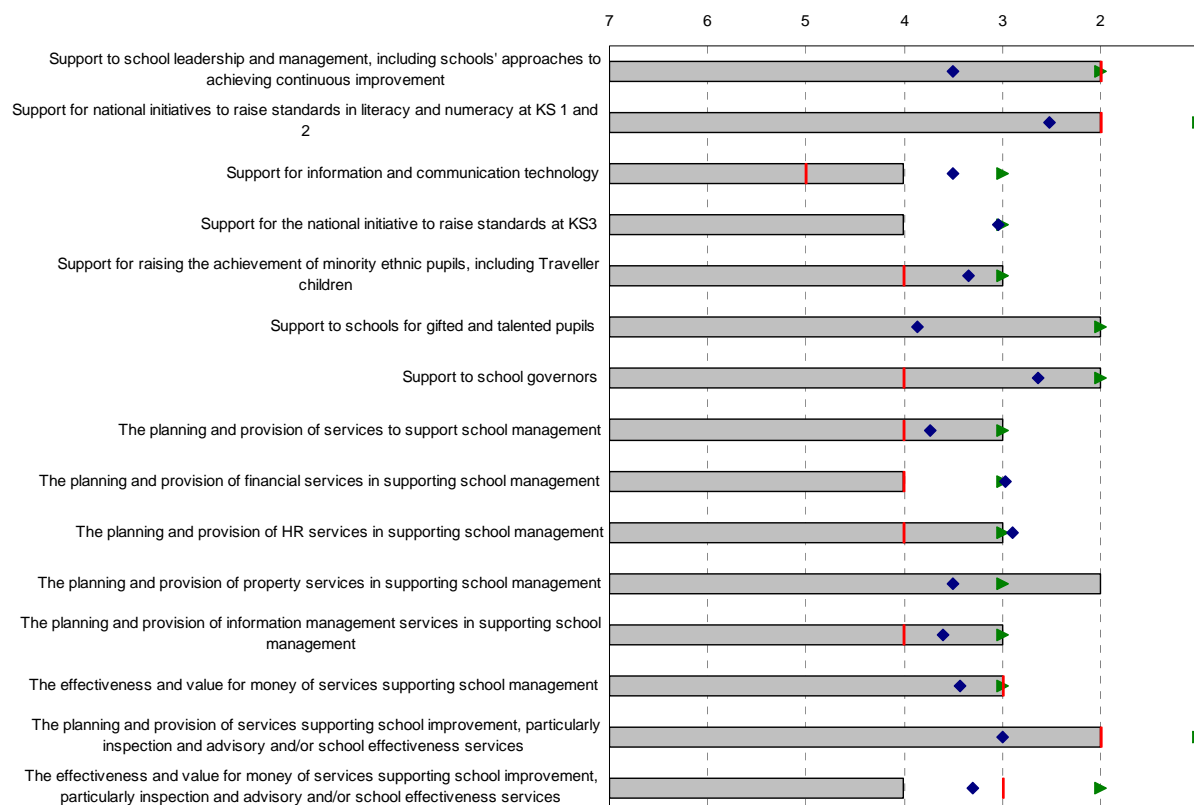
30. Improvements have been made since the previous inspection and the work of the admissions service is now highly satisfactory, with some clear strengths. Most of the shortcomings in the booklet for parents have been addressed and this is now a well-written document, available in several languages. Other significant improvements include the appointment of specific officers to manage the admission of vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, and the establishment of a common admissions pattern for primary schools across the city. A recently commissioned quality assurance report by an external consultant confirmed that the service is very efficient.

31. There are some aspects, however, where improvements are being implemented, but are not yet secure. For example, officers have recently started to encourage actively agreements between headteachers to take excluded pupils on a more equitable basis. The removal of surplus places has caused some admissions problems, which have yet to be fully resolved. There are issues surrounding the mobility of families, which are not helped by insufficiently robust links with other relevant council departments. The education department has not given enough attention to developing mutual understanding with schools about the LEA's statutory duties for admissions procedures. Schools still report dissatisfaction in some

aspects of the service and in response a programme of awareness raising meetings with headteachers has recently been implemented.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



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Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

32. The LEA has made important modifications and refinements to its work to adapt to changing circumstances since the previous inspection, and its work continues to be good. The effects of the high quality of many of its services are beginning to be seen in better outcomes for pupils, though there is still a long way to go. The complacency of some schools, noted in the previous inspection, is being shifted as the LEA encourages leaders and managers to make their schools more self-critical.

33. The LEA responded well two years ago to emerging problems it recognised in its support and challenge to schools, particularly secondary schools, by creating additional senior capacity. Although this produced a complex staffing structure, its pragmatic approach has worked. Officers and schools understand the structure, and provision is now made to schools in line with their needs.

34. The standards and effectiveness division has focused well on the need to enhance schools' ability to manage their own improvement, while retaining the capacity to intervene when necessary. This is apparent in the LEA's school improvement planning framework, which encourages schools to audit their own strengths and weaknesses; in the deployment of governor development officers; and in many aspects of the primary strategy, with its emphasis on developing school leaders' knowledge and expertise. The emphasis on supporting the capacity of school leaders and managers is also evident in the annual conference for headteachers, and in special events such as a major conference on Black achievement. The LEA's TSE initiative has already begun to disseminate good practice. Ofsted inspections also indicate improvements in schools' management, at a faster rate than the national average.

35. The weaknesses in management services for schools at the time of the previous inspection have been overcome as a result of radical action taken by the LEA, including some staffing changes. Schools now have better information about the services they can obtain from the LEA and are being equipped to become more discriminating customers.

36. The LEA spends a great deal on supporting school improvement. While it is adept at restructuring and refocusing services, and at promoting high standards of provision to schools, it is not good at evaluating the cost-effectiveness of its work. Given the high spending and the fact that some of the funding will not continue indefinitely, the LEA has only just started to evaluate whether it is achieving value for money across all provision.

Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2

37. The previous inspection judged support for literacy to be good and support for numeracy to be outstanding. Overall, the quality of provision remains good. Although the LEA's work in supporting these subjects, especially in numeracy, still has some very good features, it has had insufficient impact on pupils' performance at Key Stage 1 since 2000.

38. Work has now been drawn together into a coherent primary strategy. This is very well aligned to the national strategy, as in the attention given to improving the quality of school leadership. National materials have been tailored well to Nottingham City's needs. The consultants work closely with the link advisers and this has helped create an integrated approach to school improvement. A basic network of support is available to all schools, but several levels of additional support are provided according to individual schools' standards and their rate of improvement. Some improvements have been made since the previous inspection in focusing activity even more on schools' needs and in encouraging them to take responsibility for their own improvements.

39. The effect of this work is apparent in pupils' attainment at Key Stage 2 where, although standards are still low, the gap against national standards has been reduced annually, especially in mathematics. Schools that have received intensive support from the LEA have improved much faster than others, and their improvement has been sustained. There are now relatively few schools where pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 is weak. However, apart from more able pupils, standards have not improved at Key Stage 1. The LEA, recognising this problem, intends to refocus its Key Stage 1 work onto speaking and listening, and to relate

this work more closely to that given in the Foundation Stage. Given the high quality of the LEA team, this is likely to lead to further overall improvement.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

40. This area was unsatisfactory in the previous inspection. It is now satisfactory. The LEA has successfully achieved many of the priorities it set itself in its e-learning (ICT) strategy, particularly in relation to support for schools and the communities that they serve. Two e-learning support centres have been established and are working effectively with schools across a range of curricular areas. This work has been helped by the LEA achieving the national 2004 target for the ratio of computers to pupils in secondary schools earlier than required; the equivalent primary target is also now within sight. These factors have contributed to the sound relationships that exist between the LEA and its schools, and the better integrated and more focused approach to support for ICT.

41. Nevertheless, while attainment at Key Stage 4 has risen since the previous inspection, the overall percentage of pupils attaining a nationally accredited award in ICT is still well below the national average. The LEA's officers are well aware of this and have in place appropriate activities in the EDP.

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

42. The support for the Key Stage 3 strategy is satisfactory. There are encouraging developments, but the impact on pupils' performance, so far, has been small.

43. The LEA now has a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision at Key Stage 3 in each of its secondary schools. The strategy manager has an excellent understanding of the national strategy and has gained the confidence of schools. The Key Stage 3 team is linked well, both formally and informally, to other aspects of the LEA's support for school improvement. High quality information and advice are given to schools about tracking and analysing the performance of pupils, both individually and in groups. Despite these strengths, consultants' documentation of their work with schools is too varied in quality. Although the best shows clear and tailored planning with focused evaluation of impact, too many plans are insufficiently differentiated, with evaluations that are only anecdotal descriptions of activity.

44. Pupils' performance has improved in all three core subjects since the previous inspection, but overall attainment is well below the agreed targets, and gaps between performance in Nottingham City and nationally are not decreasing consistently enough year on year. The value added from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is among the lowest in the country, with only three schools performing above the national average. Evidence from the inspection of schools shows that a much lower proportion of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 is good or very good, compared with similar authorities or the national picture. The LEA predicts that there will be substantial improvements in outcomes in 2004. However, optimism was also expressed for 2003, and proved unfounded. There has been some improvement in secondary attendance recently, although the LEA has no separate data for Key Stage 3. Exclusion rates have dropped, but by a smaller proportion than in Key Stage 4.

Recommendation

- Improve the consistency of school support plans for the Key Stage 3 initiative, ensuring that consultants' work can be evaluated effectively.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

45. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is good. The EiC strand co-ordinator has been very active in implementing the strategy, and liaison between the EiC partnership and the LEA's standards and effectiveness division is strong. All secondary schools have identified their gifted and talented pupils, and their co-ordinators are expected to undertake an annual audit of the school's provision. Their records show that schools' commitment to improving support to these pupils is growing. Moreover, the standards achieved by the most able pupils are rising steadily.

46. The EiC partnership has given sound advice to schools and has produced a useful planning guide. The overall aim of this is to strengthen schools' capacity to plan and manage the work themselves. Beyond that, the partnership has been closely involved in developing a wide range of enrichment activities across the city for the most able pupils, and in managing a good variety of summer schools, some of which were over-subscribed. The partnership is now developing a coherent approach to supporting pupils with particular talents in sport or the arts, and has already taken the first steps by recording individuals' talents and logging their involvement in activities.

47. The LEA has taken a significant step forward by extending to primary schools the opportunity of national training already available for secondary schools through EiC. This programme is now well advanced, and is supported by guidance specific to primary schools. Furthermore, link advisers are expected to evaluate each school's progress in supporting gifted and talented pupils during their annual review. Though this is not yet fully developed, there have been occasions when a weakness has been identified in a school's provision and expert support has been called in through the auspices of EiC.

Support for school governors

48. The LEA has improved its support for governors since the previous inspection and it is now good. The authority has focused its attention on reducing the number of vacancies on governing bodies, on making them more representative of the local community, and, most importantly, on providing strategic support so that governors become more effective in managing schools. Recruitment has been tackled energetically, with approaches to local businesses and community groups, and new procedures have enabled some vacancies to be filled more rapidly. This led to a reduction of vacancies until this year. Characteristically, the service has responded well by boosting its recruitment work again. The proportion of governors from Black and other minority ethnic groups has increased significantly, and the LEA is working hard to support those governors.

49. A team of governor development officers work with governing bodies needing particular help, and are also involved in the cross-divisional work of identifying schools' problems. A small task group of experienced governors is available to join governing bodies

that feel they have weaknesses. The LEA is now also auditing the strengths and weaknesses of each governing body, with the intention of discussing these analyses with governors and supplementing the self-evaluation systems already offered to them through the school improvement framework. The link adviser's annual review of the school produces suggested issues that the governing body should tackle. However, this got off to a shaky start in the last academic year, as governors did not always give time to a discussion of the report at a full meeting.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

50. This aspect of the LEA's work is highly satisfactory. Shortly after the previous inspection, senior officers rightly identified that services were not appropriate for a modern LEA. A replacement assistant director was appointed and widespread consultations resulted in a more effective departmental structure. Performance is now highly satisfactory, and the prospects for further improvement are good.

51. Using focus groups and better financial information, the pricing structure of services has been overhauled and now reflects expenditure, while retaining schools' abilities to tailor their needs to costs. An increasing number of services offer additional elements which go beyond basic provision, at an appropriate premium. Some benchmarking and comparative pricing work is carried out, but this is mainly to ensure services are competitive against local rather than national markets. The great majority of performance indicators are improving steadily. The provision of performance data, via the brochure, is good and enables regular challenge by the focus groups and elected members, who also receive regular performance data. However, not all services provide such information in the brochure.

52. Since April 2002, three key service managers have been replaced by officers from a range of public and private backgrounds. The organisation now has a much stronger customer focus and a sharper focus to business planning is beginning to take root. This strategy is working and schools report much better service. External auditors and consultants, such as the Audit Commission, have been used judiciously to advise on aspects such as procurement, and service managers are being trained systematically in project management. A number of user groups, involving school staff, have provided good information to enable services to be realigned where needed, to improve service level agreements and increase the range of service options to schools to help them develop their capacity as purchasers. The service booklet has been improved, is on-line and contains service standards and performance information. Previous concerns from schools about the late publication of the booklet were acted on immediately. Brokerage is beginning to expand beyond areas where the council does not offer a service, thereby introducing sharper competition

Financial services

53. Financial support to both schools and the education department is satisfactory, and the prospects for continued rapid improvements are very good.

54. Technical failings and a lack of strategic direction became critical in functions such as payroll, which at one point suffered from a 40% error rate. Inadequate corporate financial systems compounded the problem. The situation was recognised by the department and steps

taken to rectify things. The payroll problems have been largely resolved, with a very small error rate and a 48 hour guarantee for problems to be solved. Most of the infrastructure and materials expected of a modern financial support service are now in place. Schools are provided with a good range of services and the new service booklet provides much clearer definitions of what is to be traded and what is provided. More secure corporate systems have been effectively introduced, consistent financial reporting is web-based, and schools will have financial planning materials by early March.

Personnel services

55. This aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory in the previous inspection. Since then, some important improvements have been made and it is now highly satisfactory.

56. Around 18 months ago, payroll and teacher administration were well below standard. Since then, simple but effective systems have been introduced to meet more demanding service standards. As a result, these areas have improved significantly. Schools rate the service much better, and are increasingly subscribing to it. Currently, 97.6% of schools buy into a good range of tailored services. Training for governors has also been successful, with a significant reduction in employment tribunals; down to only one this year. Both teaching and non-teaching unions support the service's approach to workplace reforms. Headteachers recognise that the service is playing a much more significant role in school improvement than in the past. Although not yet securely established, there are sound plans to integrate this work with the information management service. There is also some innovative thinking to explore basing senior personnel officers at selected school sites to impact on school improvement further.

Property services

57. This service has shown considerable improvement since the previous inspection and is now good. The decision to restructure service delivery from teams of individual specialists to having a senior officer directly accountable for each project has contributed to this significant improvement.

58. Costs are transparent and reasonable, and the service competes in an open market. There is no significant slippage in current projects. The service now treats the education department and schools as valued clients. Integration of work with education property staff is good at both strategic and operational levels, with meetings every two months to review progress. Property officers help schools to develop individual maintenance plans, arrange client meetings at early project stages, and help schools assess value for money by providing benchmarking data and quality assuring contractors.

Information management

59. Information management has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The LEA took a major step forward in 2002 by restructuring the education information technology services into an information management service. The approach is now based on an 'enterprise solution', which aims, rightly, to increase schools' capacity to make independent and informed IT decisions. Benchmarking, albeit of a limited scale, has been carried out

against a recognised high-performing LEA, and both the costs and the level of service were comparable.

60. The large majority of schools are satisfied with their technical support, and the LEA also offers a quality assurance service for those schools who take up outside maintenance contracts. A one-stop shop has also been installed to speed up responses to problems, which headteachers rate highly. The volume of electronic communications is increasing significantly. Information about schools' capabilities and use of information management is now recognised as key to alerting the LEA about school improvement issues.

The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services

61. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has made major changes in its structure for providing school improvement services. These changes were made in response to particular staffing situations, or in recognition of the need for new strategies for meeting schools' needs. The LEA's action has been vindicated; the new structure works very well, and the right people are now in the right place to support and challenge schools. The new structure is understood and appreciated by schools, and has led to the successful implementation of the LEA's policies for school improvement.

62. The standards and effectiveness division is managed effectively by one assistant director. However, within the division, another assistant director leads work on secondary education and also on support to schools requiring support and intervention. This unusual situation was prompted by the LEA's awareness of an urgent need to improve its capacity to work with weak secondary schools. Despite the complexity, this is a pragmatic arrangement that works. Officers have clear lines of responsibility, all teams' functions are well understood and a sense of common purpose unites the division. There is, however, some inconsistency in the work of link advisers and of the Key Stage 3 team, which makes some school improvement planning less secure. School effectiveness is also supported effectively by the inclusion division and by the equalities, regeneration and partnerships division

63. The LEA has used recruitment packages, where necessary, to appoint well-qualified staff to senior posts. Its teams are now composed of staff with relevant experience and expertise. The different teams work well together; for instance, advisers and consultants collaborate well, and governor development officers and EiC co-ordinators contribute to support programmes for schools in difficulties. Communication and training across all these areas of work are effective. Cross-service reviews of individual schools are well organised and make good use of the specialist strengths of the various teams.

64. Even given these organisational strengths, the overall effectiveness and value for money of these services are now only satisfactory. Since the previous inspection spending has risen significantly but pupils' performance has risen only slowly. Helped by considerable support from central government sources, the LEA currently spends considerably more on school improvement than comparable LEAs. This investment has not yet brought full dividends, though there are indications that it is beginning to do so.

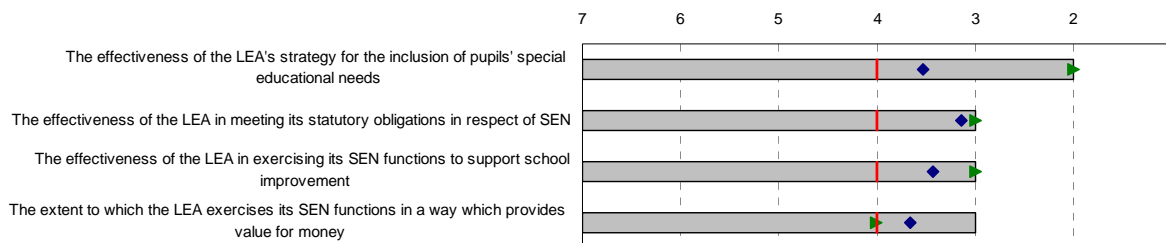
65. The LEA is good at identifying schools' needs and creating new systems and structures to meet those needs. It also keeps a close watch on its own progress against its action plans and at appraising the performance of its officers. However, it is not good at measuring the cost-effectiveness of its services.

Recommendation

- The education directorate should improve procedures for assessing the value provided by each of its services, using benchmarking against comparable authorities, and review provision where necessary.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for SEN

66. At the time of the previous inspection the strategy for SEN was satisfactory. It has improved steadily and is now good. The weaknesses previously identified have been addressed, and the LEA's strong commitment to inclusion has the widespread support of schools.

67. The LEA now has a coherent strategy for SEN and inclusion, which is based on a firm understanding of the developing range of the needs of pupils in the city. A policy statement and detailed strategy was issued in November 2002, which builds on the consultation noted in the previous inspection report and takes full account of the revised national Code of Practice. It has a high level of support from schools. Detailed action plans have been developed with a wide range of partners across 12 priority areas within the strategy. Monitoring arrangements, including linkage to the EDP, are strong, and allow for appropriate involvement of school representatives. However, timescales are not always precisely stated and some targets are unrealistically based on arbitrary assumptions about progress.

68. A review of special school provision, assisted by external consultants, has led the council to make proposals for substantial change. Nottingham City already has one of the lowest proportions of pupils in special schools in the country and these proposals will establish a better range of special school places for the future, while developing the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of more pupils with SEN. The LEA has a clear commitment to intervening early to meet pupils' special needs, and this is reflected in the strategy and in mechanisms for funding schools. The LEA uses a casework model to allocate resources through the funding formula for children at School Action Plus. It is the main reason why the LEA has been able to maintain a much lower proportion of children with statements of SEN than the national average.

69. Good partnerships have been developed with other agencies and LEAs. Strategic links with the health service have resulted in improved service delivery for speech and language therapy and mental health. Nottingham City is actively involved in the regional SEN partnership, and this is leading to promising developments in the evaluation of outcomes for pupils.

Statutory obligations

70. The LEA takes highly satisfactory steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN. A number of improvements have been made since the previous inspection. A very high proportion of educational assessments is now completed within the required time limit. The proportion of draft statements issued in time by the LEA is in line with or just above the national average. Delays are caused largely by recurrent problems in obtaining timely advice from health professionals. The LEA has taken all reasonable steps to produce draft statements on time, but sustained improvement depends on the allocation of appropriate resources within the health service.

71. The statutory assessment process and the resulting statements are well regarded by schools, and have the confidence of parents. Nevertheless, the objectives in statements are of variable quality and often do not provide a secure basis for planning and review. There is a good system for ensuring that annual reviews are conducted and attended by appropriate officers, but the quality of reviews is not monitored sufficiently rigorously. The parent partnership service is funded jointly with a neighbouring LEA; it was independently evaluated in 2002 and it offers good support to parents who use its services. However, it has received insufficient publicity.

Recommendation

- Increase the precision of objectives in statements of SEN, and improve the system for annual reviews to ensure that the objectives and descriptions of needs reviewed each year are appropriately updated and improve the mechanisms for informing parents about the partnership service.

SEN functions to support school improvement

72. This function has improved since the previous inspection because of good partnerships with schools and close linkages between the SEN and school improvement services. It is now highly satisfactory.

73. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) are well supported through groups of schools linked to the funding mechanism and through guidance and training from the LEA. A reference group for SENCOs provides an influential consultation and development forum. The LEA's SEN handbook is highly valued by SENCOs, who are also supported by good training and networking systems. The inclusive education service, established in 2001, plays a key role providing support to all schools and making an effective contribution to monitoring and training. The educational psychology service is less consistently effective in its role of supporting schools. Special schools are playing an active role in supporting inclusive practice. The progress of low attaining pupils is monitored

effectively through the LEA's system of annual performance review, though systems for measuring and evaluating the progress of pupils with high levels of special educational needs are still developing. The LEA's concerns about schools' provision for pupils with SEN have been successfully addressed through the mechanisms for schools requiring support and intervention.

Value for money

74. The costs of SEN provision are broadly in line with those of similar authorities. The very low use of statements and the high levels of inclusion in mainstream schools contribute to highly satisfactory value for money. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.

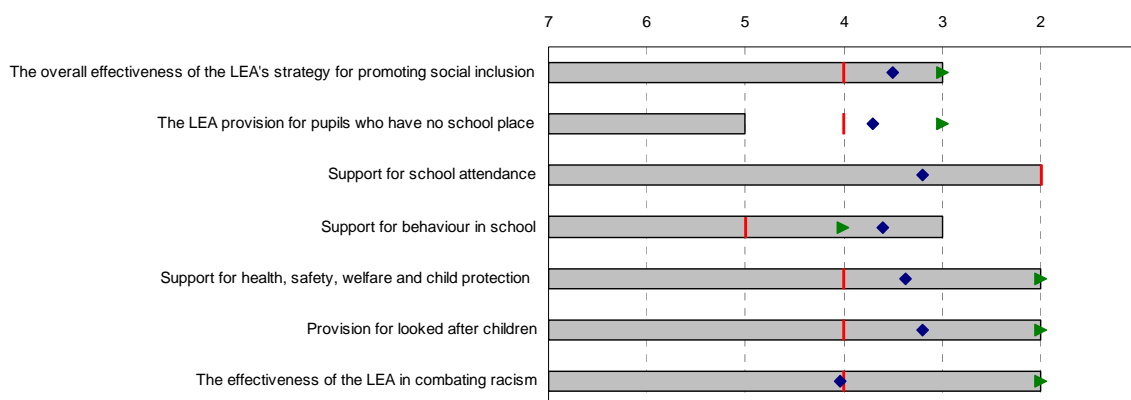
75. Schools support the funding system because they see it as directing money in an accurate and timely way to pupils' needs. However, even though the allocation mechanism has been simplified since the previous inspection, it still imposes a significant bureaucratic burden on schools. This is particularly evident for those pupils with lower levels of need within the School Action Plus group. Despite comments in the previous inspection report, insufficient attention has been given to the evaluation of the effects of delegated funding on pupils' progress. A pilot scheme for detailed financial monitoring at school level is taking place, but this is not sufficiently well linked to broader issues of school improvement or to evaluation of the funding mechanism. Central SEN budgets are well monitored, and appropriate action is being taken to seek to bring overspending on transport under control.

Recommendation

- Extend the financial monitoring exercise on SEN to cover all schools, and use the findings, together with more systematic evaluation of school effectiveness, in a fundamental review of SEN funding mechanisms and their link to pupils' progress.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The LEA's strategy for social inclusion

76. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved steadily since the previous inspection and it is now highly satisfactory. The education department is fully involved with the local strategic partnership in determining the use of neighbourhood renewal funding to ensure that this relates well to existing work. It is co-operating with voluntary agencies and others involved in Children's Fund work in refocusing the Fund's school-based activities so that they target vulnerable children's needs better than at present. The LEA works well with the police force and with an organisation of former armed services staff in helping to target action to support schools or pupils with problems. The new division of the LEA concerned with equalities, regeneration and partnerships gives valuable support to the work of the inclusion division, which has the main responsibility for this area.

77. The LEA has increased its use of external funding to support its work and has organised its use of these funds well. The EiC initiative, for example, has helped the LEA in its work on behaviour and attendance. Early indications are that the use of Behaviour Improvement Programme funding has also been beneficial, and that the use of the Learning and Skills Council funding has helped the LEA's work in broadening the Key Stage 4 curriculum. With its partners, the LEA is now giving significant attention to the sustainability of inclusion initiatives, having already planned for the expected reduction of external funding in some areas.

78. The planning and management of inclusion work continue to be highly satisfactory. The recommendations of the previous inspection have been implemented. Inclusion work is seen as fundamental to school improvement. The revised EDP activities focus on the right

things to improve provision for vulnerable young people. Not all the work has been successful, with many looked after children lacking personal education plans.

79. Overall, the services are working effectively. The new multi-agency support team is beginning to achieve some success. Procedures for referring and following up vulnerable pupils are secure. The provision of support for attendance and behaviour is proportionate to schools' needs. Services meet their statutory duties, except in one instance. The inclusion division works well with the standards and effectiveness division. It contributes specialist knowledge about schools' track record on inclusion to the routine reviews of all schools and to the review of schools requiring particular support or intervention.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

80. Although there are many positive features to the LEA's support for pupils educated other than at school, the currently insufficient provision for pupils permanently excluded means that, overall, this aspect of the LEA's work is unsatisfactory. The LEA is unable to provide the statutory 25 hours of tuition per week for pupils without a school place. In part, this is because a significant number of city residents have been excluded from schools in neighbouring authorities. In response to this, the LEA has taken steps to increase the capacity of the pupil referral units (PRUs), and the situation is likely to become satisfactory in the imminent future.

81. The LEA's strategy for improving provision for pupils educated other than at school is good. The LEA has established, within its three PRUs, a range of provision for pupils excluded from school and those unable to attend for health related reasons. There is effective provision in the pregnancy unit within the home and hospital education PRU. Alternative provision for excluded pupils at Key Stage 4 is developing well. Voluntary and work-place providers and further education colleges are used to provide a range of alternative courses, many leading to accreditation. The behaviour support service PRU is being enlarged and reorganised onto one site. There are now good arrangements for reintegrating pupils who have been placed at the PRU into mainstream schools. A reintegration teacher plans the programme, with support for individual pupils and regular reviews. For pupils for whom reintegration into school is not a suitable option other provision is found.

82. Efficient procedures are in place to enable tracking of pupils without a school place. There are well-established systems for schools to report to the LEA that a pupil has been excluded, whether permanently or for a fixed term. Schools also have regular contact with education welfare officers who ensure guidelines are followed. The LEA has clear procedures for the referral of pregnant school girls and those pupils who are ill; these are well understood and followed by schools. There are well-established arrangements for monitoring the welfare and education of children educated at home by their parents.

Support for attendance

83. Support for attendance is good and there are encouraging signs of improvement against a background of poor attendance and social deprivation. In the previous inspection it was good. The attendance rate in primary schools has remained consistent since the previous inspection and is still well below the national average. Unauthorised absence is above the

national average. At secondary level, there have been marginal improvements in attendance and unauthorised absence. However, both averages are worse than found nationally. Provisional data for 2002/03, however, show encouraging signs of improvements in attendance at both primary and secondary levels.

84. The council invests heavily in developing the capacity of the education welfare service (EWS) and supports cross-departmental initiatives and successful partnerships with other agencies such as the police. Costs are high, as additional funding has been allocated for this work from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and from the council budget. This funding has supported initiatives targeted at specific groups such as truants and pupils without a school place. High-profile activities such as the frequent truancy sweeps and high levels of successful prosecutions have produced significant amounts of publicity and have raised the awareness of parents and local communities of the importance of school attendance.

85. Support for schools is well-matched to their needs through detailed half-termly analysis of pupils' attendance patterns and by information from school improvement officers. Individual service level agreements detail the amount of support from the EWS. Well-focused preventative work is undertaken, for example in supporting pupils with poor attendance records when they transfer from primary to secondary school. Schools are supported well in introducing more efficient systems for recording and monitoring attendance. All primary schools will have electronic registration by the end of the summer term 2004, with information from this initiative already being fed back to schools and the EWS in order to target resources at improving attendance.

Support for behaviour

86. This area was unsatisfactory in the previous inspection. It is now highly satisfactory. Services have been reviewed and reorganised to meet the demands of schools and pupils better, and all schools have been provided with strategic and practical guidance on managing behaviour and reducing bullying. Partnership work with other agencies, particularly social services and the police, makes a positive contribution to the quality of support available. The LEA has made significant progress in reducing exclusions, but the rates of exclusion at primary and secondary schools are still higher than national averages and those of comparable authorities. The proportion of excluded Black boys is higher than that found in other ethnic groups, as is the case nationally.

87. The council is committed to improving behaviour as part of its regeneration strategy. Data on exclusions are analysed thoroughly and used to target support. A considerable amount of additional funding has been used to support the development of central services and to increase the amount delegated to schools. There is a good range of provision for individual pupils, including those with statements of special educational needs for behaviour. There are early intervention centres in all primary schools, and learning support units in all secondary schools. The authority has also implemented a staff development programme in managing pupils' behaviour. Multi-agency teams provide early intervention for pupils and their families in primary schools, as well as working with pupils at high risk of exclusion in Key Stages 2 and 3. The Behaviour Improvement Programme, running in 22 schools, is successfully reducing fixed-term exclusions and improving pupils' behaviour in those

schools. Headteachers are working collaboratively with officers to improve services, but many secondary headteachers remain critical of aspects of the service.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

88. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA was providing satisfactory support. Well-managed work on training and close liaison with other agencies have led to significant improvement, and the support, overall, is now good. The LEA meets its statutory responsibilities, and inspections show there are relatively few schools that make unsatisfactory provision.

89. A comprehensive programme of child protection training is in place for designated teachers, governors and LEA officers. The lead officers have taken active steps to follow up those schools where designated teachers have not attended training in the last two years. However, information about schools not attending training does not form part of the department's overall challenge and intervention system. There is a good monitoring system that includes the checking of school inspections and scrutiny of referral rates. Close working between the education welfare service and social services has helped schools understand referral thresholds, and this has contributed to an appropriately declining trend of referrals. The LEA gives schools a good range of advice on health and safety issues and there are comprehensive procedures for monitoring areas of significant risk.

Provision for looked after children

90. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved since the previous inspection, and is now good. The council has taken a committed approach to its role as corporate parent. A multi-disciplinary team uses a good range of strategies to promote educational provision for looked after children. A small team of education liaison managers provide educational support, mainly to those living in the council's children's homes. Programmes of more focused support are given to help children approaching and during Key Stage 4, and those in difficulties with their work. There is some evidence that this has a beneficial effect. Similarly, a cross-city study group gives support to increasing numbers of fostered children. Overall, this is a well-designed package of measures.

91. The council leader has taken the role of lead member for corporate parenting, thus underlining the priority given to this by the council. Elected members have received training on their responsibilities, and some are involved in visiting the children's homes run by the council and in the annual celebration event for looked after children. They have established an inter-departmental group to steer policy implementation, and they provide challenge to officers.

92. The multi-disciplinary team within the education department has established good links with schools, and has ensured that designated teachers in schools are aware of their responsibilities. It makes good efforts to ensure that these staff attend training. The team has clear knowledge of the education placement of all looked after children, whether within the city or elsewhere, and has sound procedures for monitoring the progress of children educated out of the city. However, currently, only a third of looked after children have personal education plans.

Recommendation

- Ensure that every looked after child has a personal education plan.

Promoting racial equality

93. The LEA has improved its work in combating racism, and it is now good. The education department has clear and relevant policies, its procedures are well understood by schools, and it is working usefully with community groups. The equalities, regeneration and partnership division is making progress in ensuring that this work is embedded across the LEA's activities.

94. The education department's work is governed by a clear council policy and a comprehensive race equality scheme. Its action plan covers the key issues well. The LEA's commitment to raising the educational standards of Black young people was the focus of a major and well-attended conference of schools, and is leading to the development of a strategy for improvement. Alongside this, the authority consults with community representatives, and has made major steps forward in recruiting Black and minority ethnic governors. The education department has several actions underway to increase recruitment of staff from minority groups and these are already achieving some success.

95. The LEA has given schools useful advice on implementing a race equality policy. The large majority of schools have kept the LEA informed of their policy development, and link advisers are expected to incorporate this into their annual review of each school. The LEA has also instituted procedures for schools to report any racist incidents, and it recently improved the system to ensure that it received a full response. Schools have co-operated in the implementation of this policy, and the LEA is committed to working with the local inter-agency co-ordinating group to develop a strategic response to any local needs. Significant effort have been made to ensure that the school curriculum gives sufficient attention to enhancing pupils' cultural awareness. A major course for teachers has been well attended and well received.

Appendix A: Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Nottingham City Local Education Authority
LEA number:	892
Reporting Inspector:	Brian Blake HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2004

No	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Fieldwork*
	Context of the LEA		
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	7	
	Overall judgements		
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
0.2	Overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
	Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership		
1.1	The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people	2	
1.2	The implementation of corporate planning for education	2	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	2	NF
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	3	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	3	
1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	2	
1.7	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	1	
1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	2	

1.9	Support for Early Years' education	2	NF
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	3	
1.11	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	2	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.3	The performance of schools	7	
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	2	NF
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	2	NF
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	NF
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	3	
2.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	3	
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	
Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement			
3.1	Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement	2	
3.2	Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2	2	
3.3	Support for information and communication technology	4	

3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	4	
3.5	Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children	3	NF
3.6	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	2	
3.7	Support to school governors	2	
3.8	The planning and provision of services to support school management, particularly:	3	
3.8a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	4	
3.8b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	3	
3.8c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	2	
3.8d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	3	
3.9	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	3	
3.10	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	2	
3.11	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	4	
Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs	2	
4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	3	

Section 5: Support for social inclusion			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	3	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	5	
5.3	Support for school attendance	2	
5.4	Support for behaviour in school	3	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	2	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	2	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	2	

**NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory;

Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

This inspection of Nottingham City LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2000;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners. Inspectors also visited four schools as part of the inspection of the LEA's support for the provision of education for pupils who have no school place.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the effectiveness of LEA decision-making;• support for early years;• the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention;• the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data;• the extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need;• support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Traveller children. |
|---|

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

Context of the LEA

The Nottingham city LEA was established as a unitary authority in April 1998 and serves a population of c270,000; approximately 16.5% are of minority ethnic heritage. The city is experiencing fast economic growth and rapid commercial development. It is the third richest city in terms of gross domestic product per head of population. However, the LEA continues to serve a largely economically disadvantaged population. According to the DETR index of multiple deprivation (IMD), Nottingham City is ranked as the twelfth most deprived district in England.

Since the previous inspection, secondary education has undergone significant change. Three schools have closed, one fresh start school has opened and two other schools have increased their pupil capacity number. A new secondary school opened in September 2002 and a City Academy in September 2003. One other secondary school is scheduled for closure in July 2004. Although plans for the reorganisation of primary schools were made public during the inspection, three new primary schools have been created from the amalgamation of infant and junior schools since the previous inspection. Two primary and three secondary schools are designated as requiring special measures and one primary school has serious weaknesses.

There are now 40,000 pupils of school age in 130 mainstream maintained schools. Around 15,500 are in 18 secondary schools, 20,000 in 98 primary schools, 375 in six special schools and 3,900 attending nursery schools or nursery classes. There are also four PRUs. Education provision is available for all three- and four-year-olds, with the current take-up around 87%. The percentage of pupils of minority ethnic heritage is above that found nationally. Around 80% of 16 year olds are staying on in education and training. Although overall figures for good or very good schools are below national and similar LEA figures, inspection data show that almost 60% of primary schools and 38% of secondary schools are good or very good.

The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is well above the national average at both primary and secondary level. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special education need is well below primary and secondary averages.

The performance of schools

In baseline assessments, Nottingham City pupils perform well below the standards achieved nationally.

At Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has declined since the previous inspection, with overall performance well below that found in similar LEAs and nationally. At Level 3+, pupils' performance has improved since the previous inspection in all three areas.

At Key Stage 2, pupils' performance has improved in all three core subjects since the previous inspection, most significantly in science. Despite this, the LEA continues to perform well below national averages, and is very unlikely to achieve those 2004 targets originally agreed with the DfES. However, recently agreed changes with the DfES for Key Stage 2 now make the 2004 and 2005 targets more realisable. It is also well below similar LEAs in English, and below in mathematics and science. At Level 5+, the LEA has made some gains since the previous inspection and has reduced the gap between its performance and the national averages.

At Key Stage 3, the LEA has improved its performance in all three core subjects since the previous inspection. Although the gap between its performance and the national average has increased in English, it has reduced in mathematics and science. Despite the LEA making progress in all three subject areas at Level 6+, the gap between its performance and the national average has increased across all three areas. The average point score shows improvement against the national averages. However, the LEA is very unlikely to achieve its 2004 targets.

At Key Stage 4, the LEA has made good gains in five or more A*-C grades since the previous inspection and is now moving closer to the national average. However, it still remains well below the current national average and below that found in similar LEAs. It has made a marginal gain for one or more A*-G grades, but performance against the national and similar LEA averages is still well below. At five or more A*-G grades the LEA is achieving less well than it did at the time of the previous inspection, with the gap against the national average increasing slightly. The LEA continues to perform well below the national and similar LEA averages. The average point score has improved since the previous inspection. Overall, the LEA continues to perform well below the national average and below the average in similar LEAs. Girls continue to out-perform boys in all comparators. It is very likely, however, that the LEA will not achieve its 2004 targets. Around 80% of 16-year-olds are staying on in education and training. At A level, pupils' performance is below that found nationally.

Inspection data show that almost 60% of primary schools and 38% of secondary schools are good or very good. These figures are below national and similar LEA figures.

The attendance rate in primary schools is well below the national average. Unauthorised absence is above the national average. At secondary level, there have been marginal improvements since the previous inspection, but attendance remains well below the national average, with unauthorised absence well above.

Exclusions are above the national averages at both primary and secondary levels.

Funding data for the LEA

Schools Budget	Nottingham City	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary Average	England Average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2,993	2,756	2,613	2,708
Standards fund delegated	68	62	58	61
Education for under fives	64	75	98	96
Strategic management	13	31	28	29
Special educational needs	32	108	109	120
Grants	106	101	41	53
Access	65	64	55	55
Capital expenditure from revenue	41	34	20	24
TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET	3,383	3,232	3,024	3,145
Schools formula spending share	3,103	3,011	2,808	2,904

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

LEA Budget	Nottingham City	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary Average	England Average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	113	114	86	95
Specific Grants	5	17	19	16
Special educational needs	40	33	32	32
School improvement	60	37	33	36
Access	149	109	128	133
Capital expenditure from revenue	1	1	2	2
Youth and Community	129	79	70	74
TOTAL LEA BUDGET	497	390	370	388

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

Note: All figures are net

Notes