

Inspection report
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: May 2003

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	County Hall West Bridgford Nottingham NG2 7QP
Lead inspector:	Daryl Agnew HMI
Date of inspection:	May 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Nottinghamshire local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in September 1998.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports; audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, the LEA's officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and the LEA's partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working and participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in February 1999). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to all schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 82 per cent.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria, (and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted), can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numerical grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numerical grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report which comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

4. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc, whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

6. Nottinghamshire LEA serves a county of contrasts with a wide span of advantage and disadvantage. Unemployment is broadly in line with the national average, but this masks significant disparities at district and ward level. The regeneration of the county from its former coalmining and manufacturing base has been a priority for the council, and building thriving communities, raising educational achievement and promoting social inclusion are rightly seen as crucial to the necessary process of social and economic regeneration. The county council consistently spends above the education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA).

7. At the time of the first inspection in 1999 the overall effectiveness of the LEA was highly satisfactory. Services were generally well managed, some important functions were carried out well, but it was acknowledged that standards in schools were not as high as they should be. There has been some significant progress in pupils' performance since then, particularly in primary schools where the rate of improvement is above the national trend, and in English at Key Stage 2 where it is well above the national rate. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 is broadly in line with the national average except in English at Key Stage 3 where results are below. The number of schools requiring special measures has more than halved since the previous inspection and is now in line with national figures.

8. Since 1999, there has been good progress in the quality of the LEA's support for school improvement and in the clarity and effectiveness of the partnership with schools. In particular, the pace of change has accelerated in the last two years since the appointment of the current director of education. She has built on the firm foundations of the authority, established in 1998 following local government reorganisation, and brought about a change in the ethos and values of the education service, with a stronger focus on providing high quality and responsive services for schools. Her leadership is characterised by high expectations, a strong commitment to continuous improvement, and a clear vision for education across the county. Together with her senior officers and leading elected members, the partnership with schools has been strengthened further and reflects mutual respect and trust. The high calibre of staff across the department and the sense of common purpose are highly regarded by schools. They welcome these changes in the education service and recognise the willingness to jointly seek solutions to problems.

9. The LEA has long maintained a strong commitment to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs within mainstream schools, wherever possible. Its strategy was previously largely, but not wholly, successful and, in 2001, the LEA initiated a fundamental Best Value review of special educational needs in response to growing concerns by schools about the level of funding. The high quality of this review and the ensuing improvement plan, coupled with prompt action by the LEA to tackle funding deficiencies, have contributed to the significant improvements in the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy. The review process was very well managed and demonstrated the willingness of officers and elected members to listen and to act upon the criticisms raised by schools. In so doing, they have provided strong and determined leadership, and, most importantly, have helped to restore the confidence of schools in the LEA's ability to implement its revised strategy.

10. The LEA discharges the majority of its functions well and many are good. The support for literacy is very good. The performance in the following functions is good:

- the leadership of senior officers and the quality of advice they give to elected members;
- the leadership of elected members;
- corporate planning and implementation;
- decision making;
- partnership and collaboration with other agencies;
- the school improvement strategy and its implementation, including the Education Development Plan (EDP);
- strategies for promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value;
- the leadership, expertise of staff, strategic planning, deployment, performance management and value for money of services to support school improvement, and their effectiveness;
- monitoring, challenge and intervention;
- the effectiveness of monitoring and challenge, including the use of performance data;
- focusing school improvement support on areas of need;
- support for numeracy;
- support for raising standards at Key Stage 3;
- support for management and school governors;
- personnel support;
- the LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN);
- the LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion;
- support for looked after children;
- support for early years; and
- support for 14-19 education.

11. In almost all other areas the LEA provides satisfactory and, in many cases, highly satisfactory support. There is only one area of weakness and that is in the unsatisfactory support for gifted and talented pupils. The LEA is aware of the weakness and detailed improvement plans are already in hand.

12. Nottinghamshire has made good progress since the previous inspection in 1999, particularly in its support for school improvement. It is a good LEA with very good capacity to improve further and to implement the few recommendations of this report. The good performance of the education service is reflected in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, published in December 2002. This gave the education service two stars for current performance, and three stars (the highest category) for its capacity to improve. The findings of this inspection fully endorse this assessment.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

13. Nottinghamshire County Council was established in its present form in 1998, following local government reorganisation when the City of Nottingham became a unitary authority. Nottinghamshire is a county of contrasts with a wide span of advantage and disadvantage across its seven administrative districts. The county council serves a population of approximately 750,000 with the greatest concentrations of population in the greater Nottingham conurbation and the other main towns of Mansfield, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Newark, Worksop and Retford. The county includes three types of area: urban, rural and former coalfield areas. In terms of the overall index of multiple deprivation,¹ two of the seven Nottinghamshire districts are significantly deprived; Mansfield being ranked 29 and Ashfield 31, out of 354 districts nationally.

14. Unemployment in the county has fallen gradually in recent years and is now broadly in line with the national average, but this masks disparities at district and ward levels, with the highest unemployment concentrated in the north west of the county. The regeneration of the county from its former coalmining and manufacturing base demands higher skill levels and higher educational achievement, but research data from 2001 show the county to have one of the highest skills shortages in the United Kingdom.

15. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with national averages for both primary and secondary schools. For more than a decade the council has been committed to a policy of inclusion for pupils with special educational needs and has lower than average levels of pupils with statements of special educational needs. The percentage of pupils with statements in special schools is below the national average for both primary and secondary age pupils. The percentage of pupils with statements in primary schools at 0.9 is well below the national figure of 2.7 per cent. At secondary level, the figure of 1.4 per cent is below the national average of 4.3 per cent.

16. At the time of the 1991 Census, 1.5 per cent of the population of Nottinghamshire were from minority ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 3.5 per cent of pupils in schools are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with 12.9 per cent nationally. Since January 2001, there has been an increase in the children of dispersed refugees and asylum seekers into county schools from eight to 28 pupils.

17. Significant changes to school provision have taken place since the previous inspection in 1999. A major reorganisation of schools in Mansfield has recently been completed, moving from first, middle and upper, to primary and secondary schools. Further reorganisation is taking place in Bassetlaw. Nottinghamshire maintains 211 primary, 95 infant and junior, and 50 secondary schools. There are two nursery schools. Approximately 50 per cent of three year-olds are provided for in the LEA's nursery classes. The majority of

¹ The Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (DLTR) index of multiple deprivation 2000.

schools with nursery classes are situated in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. There are 280 schools in the county providing Foundation Stage education and 220 non-maintained settings providing non-statutory school age early years education.

18. The number of special schools has reduced from 12 to eleven. There are 12 specialist schools and a further 24 schools are currently seeking specialist status. All of the county's secondary schools have sixth-form provision, many with small numbers, with the exception of the three secondary schools which, with the support of the LEA, have curtailed their sixth-form provision. An area by area review of post-16 provision is currently underway in partnership with the Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council.

Performance

19. There have been some significant improvements in pupils' performance since the previous inspection. With the exception of Key Stage 2 science, the rate of improvement in primary schools is above the national trend. In English at Key Stage 2, the improvement rate is well above the national trend.

20. Ofsted inspections and baseline assessment indicate that pupils' attainment on entry to full-time education is broadly in line with the national average. In 2001, at the end of Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils attaining Level 2 and above was in line with the national averages for reading and writing, and above the national average in mathematics. These results were in line with those for similar authorities.²

21. At the end of Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in 2001 in English, mathematics and science was broadly in line with the national average and with similar authorities, except in English where it was below similar authorities. At Level 5 and above, pupils' performance was broadly in line with both the national average and similar authorities.

22. The previous inspection report highlighted a dip in pupils' performance at the end of Key Stage 3. Although still below the national average, the results for English show a faster rate of improvement than the national rate in recent years. Performance at Key Stage 3 in mathematics and science is broadly in line with the national average. In all three subjects, results are below those of statistical neighbours.

23. At the end of Key Stage 4 in 2001, in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), 47.4 per cent of pupils achieved five or more grades A*-C which is broadly in line with the national average, but below that of similar authorities. The average point score and the percentage achieving at least one GCSE at grade A*-G were also broadly in line with the national average, but below the averages for similar authorities. At Key Stage 4, the rate of improvement is broadly in line with the national trend.

² Nottinghamshire's statistical neighbours are: Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Lancashire, Essex, Leicestershire, Cheshire, Kent, West Sussex and Worcestershire.

24. In 2001, attainment at age 17/18 was broadly in line with the national average and that of similar authorities. The staying-on rate into post-16 full-time education improved in 2001 by 3.6 per cent to 71.5 per cent.

25. Unvalidated data for 2002 indicate that pupils in Nottinghamshire schools continue to make progress. At Key Stage 2, pupils' performance in all three subjects is now in line with both the national average and that of similar authorities.

26. The proportion of schools requiring special measures, having serious weaknesses or under-achieving is now broadly in line with the national average. Since the previous inspection, the number of schools in special measures has more than halved. Ofsted inspection data indicate that the proportion of Nottinghamshire's schools that are good or very good is above both the national average for primary schools and that of statistical neighbours. However, the proportion of secondary schools in this category is below both of these comparators.

27. Attendance is broadly in line with the national figures for both primary and secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is also broadly in line in both phases. The number of permanent exclusions in 2000-2001 was broadly in line with the national figure for secondary schools and below the national figure for primary schools.

Council structure

28. There have been significant changes to the structure of the county council since the previous inspection. In January 2002, after a 16-month pilot project, the county council adopted a new, modernised constitution consisting of a ten member cabinet, including a leader, deputy leader and a business manager. Education is one of seven portfolio areas within the cabinet. There are six scrutiny committees, including the education select committee, and an overview select committee which co-ordinates and oversees the scrutiny function. Following the election in June 2001, the council is composed of 63 councillors: 39 Labour, 21 Conservative and three Liberal Democrat members.

29. The education department currently consists of four divisions: resources; operations and community services; advice and inspection; and research and development, which were established at the time of local government reorganisation in 1998. The department is led by the director, appointed in April 2001, and her four assistant directors, each of whom has a divisional responsibility. Following a rigorous self-evaluation involving feedback from schools, it is planned to reorganise the department from June 2003 into five service groups, each of which has a greater cross-departmental role, in order to enhance strategic capacity and cross-departmental co-ordination and efficiency.

Funding

30. Nottinghamshire's education Standard Spending Assessment per pupil for 2002/2003 was in the bottom 25 per cent of all counties and ten per cent below the average for England. The council's education SSA increase has broadly followed the national average for the past two years. The council has spent at 6.6 per cent above education SSA for the last five years. Nottinghamshire has taken up all of its Standards Fund options.

31. The level of delegation for 2002/2003 was high at 88 per cent, compared with an average of 87 per cent in counties. Individual school budgets (ISB) per pupil for 2002/2003 were in line with statistical neighbours and the county average for primary, although seven per cent below the national average. The ISB for secondary was below statistical neighbours, the county average and nine per cent below the national average.

	Nottinghamshire £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	County authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary ISB	2064	2055	2074	2223
Secondary ISB	2678	2879	2777	2940

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/2003.

32. The table below shows that Nottinghamshire's centrally retained funding is lower than national averages and most comparative groups, confirming the high level of delegation in previous years. The SEN centrally retained figure excludes mainstream support group funding of £78 per primary pupil and £59 per secondary pupil, as the LEA received agreement from the DfES to classify this as delegated funding. The mainstream support group funding is not included in the individual school budget table above.

	Nottinghamshire £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	County authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Central management	43	44	45	49
Other strategic management (excluding existing early retirements)	22	31	24	27
School improvement	22	27	26	31
Access (excluding transport)	49	46	42	52
SEN	99	145	143	160

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/2003.

33. In 2002/2003, the total SEN budget, including both schools' and centrally retained LEA elements, was only 11 per cent of the total local schools budget. This compares to a national average of 16 per cent and highlights a significantly lower expenditure by the LEA on SEN. In common with other counties, Nottinghamshire spends considerably above the national average on adult and community education and the youth service.

34. The LEA has been successful in bidding for capital grants in recent years, including Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, lottery funding and European Social Fund, totalling over £24 million in 2002/2003 alone. Three Private Finance Initiative bids, totalling over £140 million, have also been approved, the majority of which is to implement the reorganisation of schools in Bassetlaw.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

35. The LEA's strategy for school improvement, in particular its Education Development Plan, is good. The EDP has been used extensively to focus the work of the education department on the four national priorities and the two local priorities; improving information and communication technology (ICT) and building learning communities.

36. The LEA has used effectively a detailed evaluation of its first EDP to identify specifically progress towards targets, schools' performance, and the overall effectiveness of the LEA's school improvement services. The audit of schools' current needs is thorough and based on effective consultation processes. Strengths and weaknesses are sufficiently detailed to provide actions for improvement in all priorities, which are underpinned by 13 themes linked to local needs. The plan represents a holistic approach to improving the quality of education for all Nottinghamshire's pupils.

37. Links with other major plans are well established. Outcome targets for each key stage are consistent across all plans. Targets to improve attendance, reduce exclusions and raise the attainment of vulnerable pupils are realistic and achievable within the life of the plan. Additional local public service agreement targets have been agreed for Key Stages 2 and 4. The attainment targets for these two key stages have now been raised, but are still realisable.

38. Schools are very positive about the relevance of the EDP in identifying and supporting local needs, and headteachers are well informed about the relative progress being made by the LEA in each priority. The emphasis on regeneration activities is very relevant and these activities have been well targeted to meet local circumstances.

39. The EDP has served the LEA well in the first year of its implementation, and although there has been some slippage in a small number of priority activities, the implementation of the plan is good. The LEA's own analysis shows that it has successfully completed over 90 per cent of the activities in all priorities. The evaluation of progress is thorough, and includes monitoring for consistency of judgement within and across priorities by the relevant lead officers. Recent progress reports now show the need for refinement and reallocation of resources within each of the priorities. The LEA now has sufficient audit and progress data to update the EDP and a revised plan is scheduled for circulation to schools and other partners well in advance of the new academic year.

The allocation of resources to priorities

40. At the time of the previous inspection this aspect was satisfactory, although the report recommended a fundamental review of the funding formula and work to be undertaken

to reduce significant budget deficits. Sound progress has been made, particularly in the last two years, and this area is now highly satisfactory.

41. Nottinghamshire has consistently prioritised education within the overall council allocation of resources. This can be seen by the additional 6.6 per cent funding per year above the education SSA over the last five years. The LEA has met all government targets for delegation and this funding commitment to education, and in particular to schools, has continued in the current financial year. For 2003/2004, the LEA has passed on the full increase in the School Formula Spending Share into school budgets and supplemented the amount with an additional £1.2 million.

42. The pace of significant SEN investment over the full four-year period since the previous inspection has been too slow. Nottinghamshire is a very low spending authority on SEN, spending five per cent less (£17 million) of the overall education budget on SEN than the national average. The level of funding for SEN is the major reason for the high levels of dissatisfaction expressed by schools. Schools' responses for nine of the ten questions in the SEN section of the Audit Commission school survey in 2002 were in the bottom quartile of LEAs nationally. In 2001/2002, the LEA carried out a very thorough Best Value review to identify the issues for action and has prepared a high quality improvement plan to move the LEA forward. The need to address SEN funding issues has grown ever more urgent in the last two years. The council has responded through its medium-term financial strategy, in which the planned investment in SEN was brought forward into 2002/2003 by an innovative move to borrow against the school reserves, thus providing an immediate boost of resources to meet the urgent demands for support.

43. The council benefits from sound financial management and has a clear three-year medium-term financial strategy, introduced in 2001. Education is a high priority in the financial strategy and, more specifically, planned investment in SEN accounts for a third of all planned additional resources, amounting to £7.5 million over three years. The availability of the additional resources within the medium-term financial strategy is dependent upon the delivery of council-wide savings, including a major contribution from savings made in finance, personnel and IT support services. Appropriately, headteachers are represented on council-wide working groups to ensure services to schools are fully considered and, more importantly, that any proposals involving schools' delegated budgets are fully scrutinised.

44. The education department has secure budgetary control and lists one of its achievements as not overspending the education budget within the last ten years. However, in 2001/2002, education underspent by over £2 million. The projected underspend for 2002/2003 is currently estimated at around £600,000 (1.4 per cent), which is still too high.

45. Consultation with schools on annual budget proposals is good, timely and transparent. Budgets are distributed to schools in mid-February each year, providing schools with very detailed information on the component parts of their individual budgets. This is preceded by very comprehensive information from the director of education to all headteachers, explaining any major changes from the previous year.

46. Good progress has been made on simplifying the funding formula by reducing the number of individual factors and combining them into the age weighted pupil unit. Since the

previous inspection, the LEA has introduced an activity-led funding formula. Good work, undertaken in partnership with schools, has resulted in better targeting of resources.

47. Steady progress has been made in working with schools to reduce and contain budget deficits and budget surpluses. Focused support and joint working by education finance staff and link inspectors has raised the profile of monitoring schools' budgets. This work is beginning to have an effect, and, although the number of schools in deficit has remained constant, the overall deficit has been considerably reduced.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

48. This area was not inspected at the time of the previous inspection. The structures in place for securing continuous improvement, including Best Value, are good.

49. Nottinghamshire is committed to continuous improvement, both corporately and within the education department. The council was graded good in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2002. The Corporate Assessment highlighted strengths in strong leadership, strategic planning and clear links to medium-term financial planning. Areas for development included improving the approach to procurement and competition, and delivering a modernised personnel strategy. In response, the council established the Nottinghamshire improvement plan to formally take forward key developments.

50. Following recent improvements, the collection and publication of performance indicators in education are sound. The external auditor issued an unqualified opinion on the Best Value Performance Plan 2002/2003 in December 2002. A Best Value review of the LEA's support for SEN was completed in July 2002. The report of the review is detailed and comprehensive and the improvement plan, which is a model of good practice, has the potential to drive significant improvement within the LEA and schools. The first monitoring report on progress against targets in the plan was considered by elected members in January 2003 and demonstrated good progress in most areas.

51. Strategic planning is good, with strong links between plans. Evaluation is given a high profile and the rate of improvement is clearly monitored and reported. In those areas where the rate of progress is judged to be insufficient, appropriate remedial action is taken. The performance management framework is good and is supported by improved business planning, both of which are setting high standards for staff to follow.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

52. Since the previous inspection, the support for school improvement has improved in most areas; many that were satisfactory are now good. Recommendations in the 1999 inspection report have been tackled successfully. The pace of change has accelerated in the last two years. The appointment of a new director of education in 2001 has brought about a change of climate, harnessing the energy of officers across the department and injecting high expectations. Procedures are rigorous and transparent, both within the department and in the LEA's partnership with schools. In the school survey, there were high ratings from primary and secondary schools for most areas relating to school improvement. These ratings indicate a marked improvement in secondary schools' evaluation of the LEA's support.

53. In 1999, the LEA was criticised for spending too much time on short-term solutions for school improvement. Since then, the services to support school improvement have developed a long-term strategy. The success of this approach is evident in the rates of improvement in pupils' performance in national tests, which are often better than the national trend and that of similar authorities. The LEA is intent on demonstrating to schools how the different national and local strategies together form a coherent approach to raising standards. The LEA made a timely appointment of a deputy chief inspector with responsibility for bringing national and local strategies together into an overarching 3-16 strategy. This strategy has led to an increasingly common understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning across all phases of education, supported by effective work at each stage of transition. Only in the two areas, ICT and support for gifted and talented pupils, has the LEA been slow to bring about the necessary improvements. Both areas have experienced staffing difficulties.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

54. At the time of the previous inspection services to support school improvement were satisfactory, but there were weaknesses in performance management and in the expertise of staff. There has been significant progress since then and services are now good.

55. Energised by the strong leadership of the director and her open and honest dialogue with schools, the advisory and inspection service is now led with clarity of purpose. From the top down, officers demonstrate a willingness to be self-critical, flexible in approach and solution-focused. Communication with schools is very good and there now exists a strong partnership between the department and schools, which is demonstrated by a determination to tackle previously intractable issues together.

56. The advisory and inspection service has marginally increased in size since the previous inspection. A high turnover in staff has meant that a significant number of the present team now has headship experience in either the primary or secondary phase. Good use is made of associates, consultants, secondments and, increasingly, advanced skills teachers to complement the work of the team in providing curriculum advice and in

supporting schools causing concern. Deployment is tightly matched to EDP priorities, with regular support and supervision meetings to monitor workload.

57. Business planning across the department has improved significantly since the previous inspection and, at its best, is sharply focused on school improvement and provides a transparent system of accountability relating to quality standards. Business plans are available on the intranet and regular feedback and evaluation of services are sought from schools. Performance management is firmly embedded across the department. The profile of staff development has increased with the appointment of a departmental training officer. High quality training, induction, mentoring and support have led to a consistency in the quality of inspectors' work that was previously lacking. Headteachers recognise and value the challenge provided by inspectors.

58. Links with other services within the department to support school improvement are satisfactory. The imminent reorganisation of the department is a recognition of the need for greater consistency in the way services contribute to the school improvement agenda. The good collaboration with the research and development division is particularly critical in ensuring that all services that support school improvement have access to accurate and accessible data.

59. Financial resources targeted at school improvement are below the average for counties nationally. The costs of the advisory and inspection service, which were previously high, are now below those of similar authorities. Most services that contribute to school improvement can demonstrate their contribution to improving standards, although standards remain below average at Key Stage 3. In the circumstances, services provide good value for money.

Monitoring, challenge, and intervention

60. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention was satisfactory. Since then, there has been good progress and the LEA's approach is now good. The climate for managing change within the education service has improved dramatically in the last two years. The LEA has been able to move towards full implementation of the guidance in the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations because of open and honest consultation and communication with schools. Headteachers have a clear understanding of the finely differentiated model that has been implemented recently and the vast majority support its introduction. The model has built-in flexibility that enables the LEA to respond rapidly when changing circumstances trigger an alert.

61. Over the past four years, the programme for school effectiveness and improvement has provided a good basis for schools to become self-managing. Self-review is actively promoted and supported. School improvement reports are provided to schools on a termly basis. These reports are written with clarity and provide an accurate picture of the school in relation to standards, teaching and learning and leadership and management against agreed criteria. For those schools, which the LEA judges effective in self-management, the link inspector now makes only one yearly visit, with the school improvement report written by the school and validated by the link inspector as a desktop exercise.

62. The LEA's capacity to challenge schools has been greatly enhanced by significant improvements in the quality of school and pupil-level data now available to link inspectors, and inspectors' ability to use it effectively. Schools attest to the value of the robust professional dialogue, which promotes self-criticism and focuses positively on how improvement can be brought about. Improvement is clearly discernible in primary schools and, to a lesser extent, in secondary schools.

The focusing of the LEA's support on areas of greatest need

63. This area was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now good. Following a thorough consultation process that was responsive to schools' views, the LEA has recently introduced a highly differentiated model of support to schools. The model is based on an accurate analysis of each school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the advisory and inspection service has redirected additional link inspector time to schools causing concern and has become increasingly accurate in the targeting of its resources.

64. Intervention in schools causing concern is based on a wide range of performance indicators that are reviewed termly. The LEA has introduced a watching brief category, to ensure that no school slips through the net. Schools have a good grasp of what support they are entitled to and what they need to purchase. The LEA provides clear information to schools which elect to purchase services externally. There are comprehensive criteria for the deployment of staff, which enable effective decision making. The LEA is also well advanced in its use of financial data in the categorisation of schools. The area school effectiveness groups act as fora that bring together senior officers from across the department to review schools causing concern on a termly basis. Following a review in 2002, improvements in the working of area school effectiveness groups have led to greater clarity of purpose and coherence in support for school improvement. The criteria for deploying pupil support services are clear, and the LEA is poised to moderate criteria across services.

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

65. At the time of the previous inspection, there was inconsistency and lack of rigour in the quality of advice and challenge provided by link inspectors in their use of performance data. The LEA has made good progress in developing the expertise of staff in analysing and interpreting data to support and challenge schools. Support in this area is now good with strengths in the quality of data, the target-setting process, the accurate identification of schools' strengths and weaknesses, and well-judged intervention.

66. The LEA is effective in identifying the nature and level of support required and in monitoring its impact. The advisory and inspection service has made good strides in improving monitoring systems by introducing a detailed profile to evaluate school effectiveness and thereby identify levels of support. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the profile are agreed with schools as part of their self-review process. Information from all services, which support school improvement, is gathered and assessed through area school effectiveness groups meetings. Pupil support services are also developing their established inclusion criteria to conform to this five-point scale and thereby provide coherence and consistency across the department. Support is co-ordinated by the link inspector who is accountable for progress. The advisory and inspection service has been innovative in its use

of associates to provide support and coaching in schools where weaknesses in leadership and management have been identified. This enables the link inspector to concentrate on providing challenge.

67. The quality of link inspectors' monitoring reports is of a high standard. The reports are monitored regularly and expected to serve as a model of good practice for successful schools which now have the responsibility for writing their own. The LEA has provided guidance to headteachers in taking on this task and has instigated meetings at schools' request to support headteachers in their role as 'resident inspector'. Governors are kept fully informed and are encouraged to become actively involved in monitoring and evaluation.

68. The quality, range and level of data available are very good. The research and development division has built on an established reputation and been active in working with schools and the advisory and inspection service to meet their growing demands. The comprehensive and complementary benchmarked data are presented annually in an accessible format for schools and include guidance on interpretation. Training is of a high quality and matched to the needs of the school. The recent introduction of pupil-level data has been welcomed by schools and has led to raised expectations and greater accuracy in setting individual targets.

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

69. Support for under-performing schools was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA was taking too long to remedy weaknesses in management and teaching. Although no detailed fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection, there are strong indications that good progress has been made in refining monitoring procedures, in further differentiating the targeting of support and in improving the quality of intervention. Support is now highly satisfactory.

70. The proportion of schools requiring special measures, with serious weaknesses or under-achieving is now in line with the national average. Since the previous inspection, the number of schools in special measures has more than halved and the average time taken to bring about the necessary improvement has also reduced significantly. The LEA has been successful in introducing well-conceived, graduated support strategies for schools no longer causing concern that are effective in enabling them to become autonomous.

Support for literacy

71. The LEA has made very good progress in its support for raising standards in literacy since the previous inspection, when support was satisfactory and standards were a relative weakness. Support is now very good with particular strengths in the quality of intervention, the use of data and work on transition between Key Stages 2 and 3. In spite of the recent death of a highly regarded strategy manager, the literacy team has remained highly committed, never faltering in its determination to drive up standards.

72. Invalidated data for 2002 indicate that results at Key Stage 2 continued to rise against the national trend and, for the first time, were in line with statistical neighbours for pupils attaining above Level 4. Rates of improvement are well above the national trend and

that of similar authorities. In common with the national picture, the LEA did not reach its target for English in 2002, although standards in both reading and writing continued to rise, with the gap between the schools' aggregate target and the LEA's target closing. Boys are showing a marked improvement in achieving the higher levels at Key Stage 1, with standards that are above the national average and those of similar authorities. They are closing the gap with girls at Key Stage 2. The 2004 targets are challenging, but not beyond reach, particularly at the higher level. The increasingly effective use of data to track the progress of individual pupils, the introduction of enhanced targets through the local public service agreement, and the LEA's involvement in the teaching assistant pilot support the LEA's guarded optimism.

73. The LEA's strategy is a clearly defined part of a comprehensive 3-16 strategy and is well matched to the local context. The credible and expert team of consultants is very well led and managed, and enjoys a deservedly high reputation with schools. From the start of the initiative, the team has taken a vigorous and ambitious approach. Training is of high quality and well matched to need. There is a wide range of support that is carefully differentiated and sharply targeted. There is good communication with other strategy teams and effective collaboration with a wide range of partners. The LEA is skilful in the use of data to identify those schools where intensive support is required and to pinpoint where the weaknesses lie. Schools are increasingly competent in making use of their own data to raise expectations and inject a higher level of challenge. Consultants work closely with link inspectors to ensure that their work is an integral part of the LEA's intervention strategy in schools causing concern.

74. As well as finely targeted work in a decreasing number of schools receiving intensive support, the team works efficiently and effectively with the countywide structure of school clusters known as 'families of schools'. This structure of support has provided the base for a coherent and comprehensive approach to language development across the county. The LEA made the innovative decision to appoint family co-ordinators in place of leading teachers. This approach has been effective in supporting small schools, in challenging coasting schools and in promoting continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3. The team is recognised nationally for its work on transition and has developed bridging units of high quality at all stages of transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 3.

Support for numeracy

75. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has made very good progress in its bid to raise standards in mathematics. Support for numeracy was unsatisfactory because of the lack of challenge and targeted support. The implementation of the national strategy was initially slow to get off the ground because of recruitment difficulties. However, lost ground has been recovered and the recommendations from the previous report tackled comprehensively. Support for numeracy is now good, with aspects that are very good, such as training and targeted support for schools. Schools attest to the progress made by the team and judge the support to be good.

76. Unvalidated data for 2002 indicate that results at Level 4 and Level 5 were in line with national and similar authorities. The LEA met the national target, but missed its own target by one per cent. Rates of improvement are above the national trend and that of similar

authorities at Key Stages 1 and 2. The LEA has made good progress in raising schools' expectations of higher attaining pupils at both key stages and those targets are within reach. The target for those pupils reaching Level 4+ in 2004 is challenging. Although there is a small gap emerging between schools' aggregate target and the LEA's target, the LEA's positive approach and the good plans for under-performing schools through tailor-made support have the potential to inject fresh impetus.

77. The team is very well led and managed and has been strengthened by the appointment of a senior numeracy consultant. Consultants have credibility with schools and are seen as expert and enthusiastic. Honest self-appraisal has led to improved induction procedures and training that is rigorously planned and systematically evaluated. Schools acknowledge the high quality of training, guidance and work in the classroom. While there has been a small incremental increase year on year in schools without support, those schools which have received intensive support for one or two years are improving at a faster rate than the county overall.

78. From the outset of the initiative, the LEA conceived a comprehensive strategy to raise standards that involved the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. This approach has provided a solid platform for sustained progress. Consultants and link inspectors work closely together and have recently begun joint visits to evaluate intervention programmes. Good use is made of a wide range of data in order to challenge schools to raise their expectations. Links with other strategies and services are satisfactory overall. Good progress has been made in developing the use of ICT in numeracy, but links with the ethnic minority support service are underdeveloped. Valuable work is being undertaken on data handling cross-phase as part of the LEA's 3-16 strategy to promote continuity and progression. In addition, the LEA has recently offered training to families of schools, which has been well received. The role of leading mathematics teachers has evolved in response to feedback from schools and is central to the LEA's effective dissemination of good practice.

Support for information and communication technology

79. The LEA's support for curriculum information and communication technology was not previously inspected. The quality of support is satisfactory and reflects the many changes and the progress that the LEA has made since that inspection.

80. The most significant change has been the linking of support for curriculum and administrative ICT thereby creating the education information technology service (edIT). This is an appropriate response to the changing and increasing ICT demands which schools now face. The service represents a one-stop shop for school support, but it has been subject to some technical problems and, currently, there are in excess of 30 schools that cannot make full use of the service offered. The LEA is looking at this sympathetically, with specialist staff offering bespoke support to those schools. Other actions to address funding for new hardware, which can be supported by edIT, are also being considered, but these are yet to make any significant difference. Overall, however, the ratio of pupils to computers is better in primary and special schools than that found in other LEAs; it is in line at secondary level.

81. School inspection data indicate that the LEA's primary schools are generally achieving in line with the averages found nationally and in LEAs with similar characteristics.

However, at secondary level, similar comparisons show that the LEA's schools are below at both Key Stages 3 and 4. The LEA is fully aware of this and has, quite appropriately, identified this area as a local priority in its Education Development Plan. Progress against the targets for this EDP priority is satisfactory, but there has been slippage in some of the activities, due in part to staff absence. Work is continuing at a steady pace to develop better connectivity and an ICT infrastructure through the edit service. The broader uses of ICT across the curriculum are also progressing at a steady pace, with work in the national literacy and numeracy initiatives, and for some groups of vulnerable pupils, particularly good. The LEA is also appropriately scrutinising school inspection data to determine the quality of teaching for ICT as a separate subject, and as a contributor to the teaching of the core subjects. However, the LEA is not yet fully aware of the use and effectiveness of ICT across all other subject areas.

Recommendation

In order to assist the LEA in its support for information and communication technology:

- implement fully the actions identified in the EDP, which target the use of ICT in helping to raise standards in all national curriculum subjects.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

82. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 was not inspected previously. The current provision is good. The LEA has developed a strong partnership with its schools and is implementing the national strategy effectively in a local context in order to tackle the long-standing dip in achievement at transition. The strategy is aligned closely to the implementation of national strategies at Key Stage 2 and the local Key Stage 4 strategy. It builds very effectively on secondary schools' previous involvement in an action research project with a focus on teaching and learning. This in turn has led to the promotion of a coherent approach across all strands of the strategy and across Key Stages 3 and 4.

83. The LEA has piloted four of the five strands of the strategy and has taken full advantage of early implementation. Schools have involved all three year groups in their focus on improving teaching and learning. A detailed and measured evaluation was undertaken by three headteachers, which identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement. The LEA acted swiftly upon their recommendations and has sustained the momentum during the full implementation stage. As a result, the LEA has continued to foster the same level of drive, commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated in the pilot schools. The LEA has actively encouraged the pilot schools to play a full part in sharing good practice and the lessons they learned.

84. Standards in mathematics and science are in line with the national average, but below similar authorities. Standards at Key Stage 3 in English are below the national average and that of similar authorities, although the gap is closing with double the rate of improvement in the last three years. Rates of improvement are above the national trend. Attendance rates are improving, but there has been a small increase in fixed-term exclusions in Years 7, 8 and 9 in line with the national trend. The Key Stage 3 targets set for 2004 are

suitably challenging and within reach. In 2002, the 14 pilot schools made demonstrably better progress than other schools with significant gains for many schools in all or some subjects.

85. The strategy is very well managed and co-ordinated by the strategy manager who also manages two of the strands. The growing team of consultants bring expertise and enthusiasm to their role and work well together as a team, as well as liaising effectively with link inspectors, other consultants and advanced skills teachers. There is accurate identification of under-performing schools and departments, and a co-ordinated response to planning, monitoring and evaluation. Training has been very well attended, often by whole departments, because of the LEA's ability to translate national materials into a local context and by the sensible scheduling of training events.

86. Continuity between Key Stage 2 and 3 is now a real strength. The LEA has developed a strong 'family of schools' structure across the county through work in literacy and special educational needs. Most of the 50 families function well and many have a history of active collaboration and joint problem-solving. This structure is being harnessed effectively to challenge schools to raise their expectations and to build on previous achievement. Almost all families of schools are using the bridging units, which have been developed by the LEA and have attracted national interest. The LEA has good capacity for further improvement.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

87. Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers, has not been subject to fieldwork on this inspection. This area of the LEA's work was not inspected previously, but has retrospectively been graded highly satisfactory following the submission of evidence by the LEA as part of the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment of the local authority. A scrutiny of the LEA's documentation fully endorses this assessment.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

88. Support for gifted and talented pupils was not included in the previous inspection. Work in this area has been slow and support is currently unsatisfactory. An extensive audit of schools' needs took place in 2000 and led to the development of a policy and comprehensive guidance, but the LEA failed to build effectively on this work.

89. The LEA does not have a coherent and comprehensive strategy to pull together the work that is being tackled effectively through national strategies, the local Key Stage 4 strategy and the good provision for curriculum enrichment. Even though the arts support service and the environmental education support service are currently part of the school improvement division, their work with gifted and talented pupils runs in parallel. A steering group was belatedly formed at the end of 2002 to bring all relevant services together, but there has only been one meeting to date. In the EDP, the LEA has included an activity for able pupils and those with exceptional talent in its priority to narrow attainment gaps and tackle underachievement. Insufficient progress has been made towards the targets because of staffing difficulties.

*Recommendation***In order to raise the profile of gifted and talented pupils and to track their progress:**

- establish and implement a coherent and comprehensive strategy for schools; and
- provide clear guidance on the identification of these pupils.

90. The proportion of pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 achieving higher levels at the end of key stage national tests is at least in line with the national average and similar authorities; the rates of improvement exceed both. However, this level of high attainment is not sustained at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 where results compare unfavourably with the national average and that of similar authorities, with the gap widening for the very able pupils. The LEA is unable to track the progress of gifted and talented pupils because there is little consistency in the ways in which schools identify these pupils. Even within the county's families of schools, there is little evidence that work in this area has been developed.

91. In order to reinvigorate its support for gifted and talented pupils, link inspectors undertook an audit of provision in spring 2003, involving 60 per cent of primary and secondary schools. The audit was not undertaken in sufficient depth or linked to outcomes, but has acted as a useful first step in identifying schools' needs. The LEA has recently appointed two consultants whose brief includes the identification of good practice for gifted and talented pupils. The termly newsletter provides useful information and guidance, but the website is at a very early stage of development.

92. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has initiated a number of worthwhile activities, alongside the work that is developing in specialist schools, but these have not been drawn together into an overarching strategy. Schools have been supported in providing a range of summer schools, most of which recruit to capacity. There was broad evaluation of the provision, but not in sufficient detail to track the progress of individual pupils. There are good links with national organisations and the LEA is co-hosting an international conference later this year. About 20 pupils have enrolled in the national academy, but the LEA has not been active in promoting links with independent schools or higher education for the long-term benefit of staff and pupils.

93. Not surprisingly, schools judged support for gifted and talented pupils to be poor and in the lowest quartile nationally. Neither schools, nor the LEA, have seen this area of work as a top priority. The LEA's recent audit indicates that only about half of all schools have a co-ordinator and a significant number do not use the LEA's guidance. There is much ground to make up, but the LEA has demonstrated its willingness to redefine its priorities, to strengthen its leadership and to act urgently to accelerate the pace of change.

*Recommendations***In order to identify and share good practice in the support for gifted and talented pupils:**

- undertake an in-depth audit in all schools that focuses on outcomes as well as provision; and

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- promote the creation of designated co-ordinators in all schools.
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Support for governors

94. The LEA's support for governors was good at the time of the previous inspection. No detailed fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection. The LEA judges support to remain good and there is no evidence to suggest any deterioration. In response to a recommendation in the previous report, the LEA has put in place good systems to reduce the length of time that vacancies for LEA governors remain unfilled.

Support for school management

95. This aspect was not the subject of fieldwork during this inspection. Support for school leadership and management was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Responses in the survey demonstrate that both primary and secondary schools rate the LEA's support to develop leadership and management skills in schools, including support for school evaluation, as good and in the top quartile nationally. Scrutiny of the documentary evidence provided by the LEA and discussion with a broad cross-section of headteachers affirm the findings of the survey and indicate that the LEA's self-evaluation has erred on the side of caution. Current provision is good.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

96. This area was not inspected at the time of the last inspection. The council's approach to securing suitable management support services is now highly satisfactory.

97. A thorough and transparent options appraisal on procurement mechanisms has been carried out by the council and properly reported to elected members. As a result, a decision has been taken to continue to provide most support services in-house. In order to ensure sound value for money from this approach, the council has sensibly set itself a robust target of generating considerable savings in order to support further front-line services (see paragraph 43).

98. The 'Management Choices' booklet is a timely, well-presented document which enables schools to make informed choices about traded services offered by all departments within the council. Service level agreements are clear, and are offered on an annual basis with flexible options offered in most cases. Nottinghamshire has good self-evaluation mechanisms, and service delivery has continued to improve, with schools being able, within acceptable limits, to tailor service delivery to their needs. The LEA has started to include some information on alternative providers in the booklet 'Management Choices' distributed to schools this year, although this information is at an earlier stage of development. It is unsatisfactory that, currently, the LEA does not provide details of statutory or core services delivered to schools.

99. The **education finance service** was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. No fieldwork was carried out, but the school survey indicates that the service is highly satisfactory. Good progress has been made in focusing the service on the wider school

improvement agenda. Effective criteria have been developed and implemented in order to differentiate support to individual schools.

100. The LEA's support for **human resources** was good at the time of the previous inspection and no detailed inspection work has been undertaken. The school survey rating is high and all other documentation confirms that it remains a good service.

101. **ICT administration** was not previously inspected. Provision is satisfactory. There is an appropriate education ICT strategy in place, which gives an overview of the current position and improvement priorities. Recent progress has been made on purchasing a new integrated information management system for the education department, which will improve further the use of pupil data within the LEA.

102. ICT support to schools is now provided by the LEA's edIT service based within the education department. Prior to April 2000, the service was provided by a combination of support from within the council and a private sector organisation. This arrangement did not work well. As a relatively new service, edIT has not, as yet, totally recovered from the difficulties it inherited in April 2000. Positive steps have been taken to date; not least the development of the edIT business plan which is a good, well-constructed document. The service has not focused enough on the individual needs of schools, although plans are now in place to improve customer care and communications. In the school survey, technical support and electronic communications were graded slightly below satisfactory. The LEA is now working with the East Midlands Broadband Consortium in order to improve the consistency of services currently received by schools.

103. The council has a well developed website, although it cannot yet be used for the provision of education services electronically. Plans are in place to develop access to school admissions and student awards services when the latest upgrade is completed. A useful intranet service is available to schools providing a full range of the LEA's publications, guidance material and the LEA's correspondence. Helpfully, the intranet can be accessed both through the council-wide area network and remotely via the Internet.

104. **Property services** were satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. No detailed fieldwork was carried out during the inspection although the response of schools in the survey for this inspection indicates that support remains satisfactory.

105. **Cleaning and grounds maintenance.** These areas were not previously inspected. They are now satisfactory. Services are provided direct to schools by the in-house direct service organisation. Regular customer satisfaction surveys are undertaken and appropriate cost comparisons are made with bench marking groups. Managers negotiate directly with individual schools on specification requirements.

106. **Catering** was not previously inspected. The provision is highly satisfactory. An effective client service is available for schools to purchase through a separate service level agreement. This provides support and advice in procuring catering contracts and meeting statutory responsibilities. A centrally arranged in-house school meals contract is offered to schools and is bought back by 97 per cent of primary schools and 71 per cent of secondary schools. Schools rated the catering service above satisfactory in the school survey for this inspection. Budgets for school meals were delegated to primary schools in April 2002.

Nottinghamshire has a very good website providing full information on menu content and healthy eating promotions.

107. Benchmarking data are used effectively to identify areas of high cost and to implement cost reduction, and the council has recently decided to reinvest all contract surpluses into the school meals service. However, paid meal prices in Nottinghamshire are high, and the accountancy practices used do not readily allow the cost of a free school meal to be calculated.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

108. This area was not inspected at the time of the previous inspection. Since then, the number of unfilled teacher vacancies has remained fairly consistent, and, although there is some geographical variation across the authority, there are no significant problems facing schools at this time. The provision for assuring the quality and supply of teachers is highly satisfactory.

109. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has appointed a recruitment strategy manager to liaise with education personnel and take responsibility for the co-ordination of different activities designed to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers across all phases within the LEA. This recent appointment is helping the LEA to plan strategically and work more effectively with schools on recruitment and retention issues. A useful database containing information about the teaching population has been produced, and plans are well advanced to extend this to include vacancy information as well.

110. Current strategies for the recruitment of newly qualified teachers are satisfactory. A teacher registration scheme is used to identify prospective new teachers, the details of which are helpfully shared with schools. Induction programmes and professional development opportunities for newly qualified teachers and new headteachers are good. A team of three inspectors from the advisory and inspection service has been appointed to develop and co-ordinate professional development for teachers, especially middle and senior managers, from across the county. This strategy is working well, and productive links are now established with officers from all services within education, especially link inspectors, who work directly with schools on school improvement matters.

111. The retention rate of newly qualified and more experienced teachers has improved since the previous inspection. Almost 90 per cent of new teachers stay on for a second year, with only eight per cent of experienced teachers leaving the authority during or at the end of the academic year. Induction programmes for new headteachers are good, with appropriate training opportunities for subject staff and senior managers in schools.

112. Other suitable initiatives are also in place. There is a sound strategy in place to increase the number and use of advanced skills teachers. The graduate teacher programme is being developed further, and supply teachers can join a county pool and receive free professional training. Although these are all sound approaches to support teacher recruitment and retention, there is currently an under-representation of teachers from the minority groups who help make up the general population within Nottinghamshire.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

113. Nottinghamshire LEA has long maintained a strong commitment to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs within mainstream schools, wherever possible. This was acknowledged in the previous inspection and its strategy was largely, but not always, successful in meeting pupils' needs. The LEA responded promptly to the report's recommendations. However, it was recognised in 2001 that there was still a lack of consensus among schools regarding the LEA's strategy and growing concerns about SEN funding. The director of education, on taking up her appointment in 2001, initiated a fundamental Best Value review of special educational needs in mainstream schools. This review was detailed and rigorous, and involved extensive consultation with schools and other partners regarding the LEA's services for children with special educational needs. More importantly, it also brought a sharp focus on the area of most concern to schools, that of SEN funding.

114. Senior officers and elected members fully accepted that the overall level of funding for SEN was too low. They have acted promptly upon the recommendations of the Best Value review and of the SEN funding task group. Progress in the last six months has been rapid. The LEA has set out its vision and strategy in a new document which is clear and comprehensive. Funding for SEN has been significantly increased for the current financial year and through the council's medium-term financial strategy, there is a commitment to additional funding for a further four years. There is a widespread commitment from schools and other partners to the LEA's strategy for SEN and inclusion, and pride in what has been achieved in the county to date. The strong and determined leadership provided by the director and elected members, together with their willingness to listen to and act upon the concerns raised by schools, have restored the confidence of schools in the LEA's ability to implement its strategy. It is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the changes arising from the Best Value review and the new funding arrangements, but the LEA's capacity for further improvement is good.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

115. The LEA's strategy for SEN was satisfactory at the time of the 1999 inspection. The LEA's initial self-evaluation for the inspection judged the strategy satisfactory, mainly as a result of the critical response in the school survey to the LEA's provision for SEN. However, the LEA has made very considerable progress in the past six months, in particular, since the publication of the Best Value review report and the implementation of the comprehensive improvement plan. The LEA's strategy for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is now good.

116. The LEA's revised special educational needs and inclusion strategy was published in April 2003 and is the culmination of two years' work to identify the best ways of improving SEN provision in the county. The LEA's approach to inclusion is based on the principle of making provision for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools and fully recognises the need to increase the capabilities of mainstream schools. The proportion of pupils in special schools,

at 0.6 per cent, is very low compared to the national average of 1.1 per cent. The LEA has worked with special schools to develop dual placement as an alternative to full-time special school placement. Special school headteachers have been involved in a recent consultation exercise regarding the future role of special schools and an agenda for action has now been agreed as part of the overall strategy.

117. The LEA's strategy sets out a clear policy framework that fully reflects the national agenda for SEN and principles to guide the local approach. The principles have evolved from extensive discussion and consultation with schools, parents and other partners. The strategy also includes a clear plan of action linked to the Best Value review improvement plan and success criteria to judge progress against 12 local priorities. Aspects of the SEN and inclusion priorities for the authority are also clearly reflected in other key plans, most notably the EDP, the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan, the school organisation plan and the asset management plan. Dedicated plans such as the accessibility plan and the SEN training plan are also in place to support the implementation of the LEA's strategy.

118. The strategy fully reflects the new SEN Code of Practice and is based on a good knowledge of current and emerging pupil needs, pupils' attainment and costs. A detailed audit was undertaken as part of the Best Value review process and is supported by an analysis of school inspection data which shows that provision for SEN in primary and secondary schools has improved since the last inspection. Targets are set in the EDP for lower attaining pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorders. The use of 'P' scales³ to measure pupils' progress has been in place in a number of schools as part of a local inclusion project and this work has been extended so that currently 151 schools, including all special schools, are using them to assist in target setting.

Statutory obligations

119. At the time of the previous inspection the LEA was taking reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations. Despite serious staffing difficulties, the LEA has improved aspects of its work in this area and the overall provision is now highly satisfactory.

120. In 2002/2003, the percentage of statements completed within the statutory time limits, excluding exceptions, improved to 78 per cent. The recent Best Value review recommended more transparency of decision making and improvement in the speed with which statements are issued. The LEA has set itself challenging targets and action is planned, and in some cases underway, including the co-location of all casework management staff, the introduction of a new data system to improve the efficiency of monitoring and the establishment of a multi-agency stakeholder panel, co-ordinated by the voluntary sector, to oversee the statutory assessment and statementing process.

121. Schools are fully involved in the new structures established to allocate resources and to moderate practice through the long established 'family of schools' structure. They now have a better understanding of the relationship between statements and additional funding. The new SEN funding arrangements ensure that there is no financial incentive for statements,

³ 'P' scales refer to pre- and interim levels of attainment.

since they are not required for children in mainstream schools to receive additional support. Needs identified during the assessment process are generally met immediately, matched to the appropriate SEN funding block, either from delegated school funding, devolved 'family of schools' funding or through the newly established high level needs panel. All decision making under this new system is supported by a framework of technical descriptors of need, which have been developed with a group of headteachers, special educational needs co-ordinators and specialist support service staff. The LEA currently maintains one per cent of pupils with statements of SEN, which is well below the national average and that of similar authorities, and this figure has remained stable for a number of years, compared to increases nationally.

122. The LEA has also responded effectively to a recommendation to ensure that pupils with significant special educational needs who transfer in and out of the county are not disadvantaged. A contingency budget is now in place to fund additional support costs for pupils who transfer into the LEA with a statement specifying resources and a regional arrangement operates whereby additional support funds can be recharged regardless of whether or not a pupil has a statement. The LEA has a strong commitment to inter-agency working and SEN services are involved in a range of inter-agency activities designed to improve provision for pupils with SEN. A children's commissioning group for the county draws together service managers and planning officers from education, social services, primary care trusts and the voluntary sector. A joint proposal to run an integrated Children's Trust pilot for disabled children has been submitted. Collaboration with other agencies and the voluntary sector has also been effective in delivering a range of early intervention programmes, most notably, the early communication and autism pilot which involves work with young children and their parents.

123. Arrangements for monitoring the provision set out in statements and the annual review process have improved since the last inspection. Revised annual review guidance was published in November 2001. The percentage of statements reviewed and discontinued is well above the national average and that for similar authorities.

124. The LEA has a strong commitment to partnership with parents and provides effective advice and information through the highly regarded parent partnership service. The service is the subject of a joint arrangement between the City of Nottingham and the county council, and is located within the voluntary sector, under the umbrella of the Family Welfare Association. An external evaluation of the service praised its support for parents. The service provides a higher than average ratio of independent parental supporters who are trained through an accredited programme. The LEA is also part of a regional consortium which commissions mediation support services; in 2002/2003, only one case was put forward for mediation.

School improvement

125. Support for school improvement in relation to SEN was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The LEA has responded effectively to the recommendations in the report and the support to schools is now highly satisfactory.

126. In 2000, the LEA created the inclusion support service following a review of outreach services from special schools and by bringing together a number of smaller SEN service teams. The service also includes an inclusive technology group staffed by technicians and innovative work has taken place to develop specialist curriculum resources including ICT software. Schools are generally clear about their entitlement to services and the current configuration of services has led to a more coherent, equitable and consistent level of support for schools. However, the Best Value review process identified the need to ensure better co-ordination of service provision across the inclusion support service and other SEN services, such as those for behaviour support, the education psychology service and physical disability. Planned action to address this issue is through the newly developed approach of 'springboard' meetings which aim to establish support priorities for schools and ensure a coherent and efficient response from services.

127. The LEA has responded well to the recommendation to develop a strategic training plan for the development of teachers' capabilities to support greater inclusion. The quality of training for school staff, and special needs co-ordinators and teaching assistants in particular, is good. The LEA has appointed an SEN training officer and a comprehensive training programme, including accredited courses, is brokered and organised by the SEN training team. A particular strength is the induction and mentoring programme for new special educational needs co-ordinators which is accredited by a local university and was highly praised by special educational needs co-ordinators interviewed for the inspection. A teaching assistant support officer has also been appointed to provide induction training for teaching assistants.

Value for money

128. This aspect of the LEA's work was not covered in the last inspection. Up to 2000/2001, the level of SEN expenditure was the lowest of all local education authorities. In 2002/2003, the situation improved as a result of additional funding agreed by the council, but Nottinghamshire continues to spend a very low proportion of its budget on SEN. In this context of low funding for SEN, Nottinghamshire has nevertheless maintained a high and stable rate of inclusion, a low and stable rate of statementing; a low dependency on out-of-county placements, average levels of exclusion and low levels of appeal to the SEN Tribunal. The LEA provides highly satisfactory value for money.

129. Limited progress had been made to improve the monitoring of progress and the outcomes for pupils with SEN. This issue has been addressed in the Best Value review improvement plan and implementation is in its early stages. A new and simplified system of accounting has been introduced to support families of schools in the monitoring of their delegated funding for SEN. Two administrative officers are being appointed to work with schools in tracking expenditure linked to the progress pupils make towards individual targets. This development is supported by schools. School inspection data indicate that the proportion of lessons where pupils with SEN make good progress is higher than the national average and that of similar authorities at Key Stages 2 and 3. However, at Key Stage 4, the proportion of lessons is lower for both comparators. There are, however, no schools where pupils make poor progress, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally.

130. The distribution of funding to special schools is open and transparent and operates according to weighted technical descriptors of need agreed with special school headteachers. This followed a detailed exercise to establish benchmarks. The distribution is subject to annual moderation involving special school headteachers and educational psychologists.

131. The LEA's planning and monitoring of central SEN budgets are good. Over the period since the last inspection, SEN support services have not overspent their budgets. All SEN services monitor their effectiveness against improvement priorities and targets within their business plans, and use a variety of means to seek feedback from users on the quality of the service. A major outcome of the Best Value review has been to develop a more user-focused approach to the delivery of services and to their impact on schools, and this is reflected in the improvement plan. All services operate performance management schemes and for teaching services this includes target setting linked to pupils' progress.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

132. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's support for social inclusion was generally unsatisfactory. Since then, this aspect has assumed a prominence within the county council that is reflected fully in major plans and, in particular, in the work of the education department where support for vulnerable pupils is a major priority. There are now effective working practices within and across the majority of support services in this area. Lead officers in all aspects of social inclusion have a sense of purpose and commitment, and a willingness to work with a wide range of partners for the benefit of Nottinghamshire's pupils.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

133. This area was not inspected at the time of the last inspection. The LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion is good. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has maintained a strong commitment to the promotion of social inclusion in order to improve the life chances for its most vulnerable pupils. This emphasis is seen clearly in the major plans of the authority as a whole and in the education department in particular. The LEA is engaged in many different activities that are contributing positively to the regeneration of areas that have a background of social and economic deprivation. This work is making a significant contribution to the LEA's good quality strategy to promote social inclusion.

134. Plans are at an advanced stage to reorganise the education department to reflect the increasing importance attributed to social inclusion. There will be five service groups, including one which will encompass the full provision for vulnerable pupils. Line management responsibilities will broaden beyond the education department and will link more appropriately to other corporate areas, which are similarly promoting the social inclusion agenda. This development is both timely and appropriate.

135. The EDP includes a strong emphasis on promoting social inclusion activities within education. The links with the education strategic plan are clear and consistent. Data are used well to target those pupils most at risk of underachieving, including looked after children and pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds. The progress of these pupils is generally encouraging, although like many other LEAs, there remains considerable variation in the performance of pupils from different minority ethnic groups.

136. Links with partner agencies are good. There are now well-established procedures for joint officer and partner meetings to develop agreed strategies and action relating to those pupils at greatest risk. These include truancy patrols run jointly by the police and the education welfare service, ICT initiatives for looked after children and their carers, and well developed training opportunities for adults who work with children on the child protection register. Links between senior officers from education and social services are also good. This effective joint working across many different agencies has been one of the key reasons for the additional funding, which the authority has sought and been granted. These additional monies have successfully financed a number of Sure Start initiatives and Neighbourhood Renewal schemes targeted at some of the most deprived county districts.

The supply of school places

137. At the time of the previous inspection, the planning of school places was unsatisfactory, due mainly to the substantial number of surplus secondary school places. Good progress has been made in removing secondary surplus places and overall performance is now highly satisfactory.

138. Since the previous inspection, 1200 primary places and 1650 secondary places have been removed, with a further 1200 secondary places about to be removed by September 2003. The reduction in places has been achieved by taking and managing some difficult decisions resulting in the closure of 18 schools. Major secondary reorganisations in Newark and Mansfield, the closure of a secondary school, plus amalgamations of infant and junior schools have all contributed to the reduction in surplus places. The current levels of surplus places in primary and secondary schools are broadly in line with recommended norms.

139. Primary pupil forecasting is accurate, compares well with comparator groups and the level of accuracy is improving. However, the accuracy of secondary pupil forecasting is deteriorating and does not compare well with comparator groups. The LEA is currently taking steps to address this issue.

140. Appropriate links to school improvement and SEN issues are detailed in the school organisation plan, with detailed extracts from and references to the EDP and other relevant plans. The major factors affecting the management of school places are listed in the plan and rightly include improving standards and ensuring schools are both educationally and financially sustainable. Good consultation is undertaken by the LEA on school place planning with stakeholders. Communication and documentation detailing planned reorganisations have improved progressively since the last inspection.

141. The school organisation committee is properly constituted and secure steps have been taken to ensure its independence. The committee made a sensible decision to defer publication of the school organisation plan until current data requirements were known. The current draft is fit for purpose and helpfully anticipates future regulations.

142. The school organisation plan highlights the significant reduction in primary pupils forecasted over the next four years, and the fact that the number of primary schools with more than 25 per cent surplus places will almost double to 83 by 2007/2008. The plan rightly describes in outline the reductions required in each of the seven districts of the county to manage future forecasted surplus places. This will be a major challenge for the LEA to manage and an essential stage in their aspiration to be among the top 25 per cent of LEAs in school place planning within the next eight years.

Asset management

143. This function was not inspected previously. Asset management planning is highly satisfactory. The school survey graded Nottinghamshire in the top quartile for asset management planning, not least because of the transparent approach to strategic decision making and capital investment allocations within the LEA. Appropriate, open and honest consultation on the overarching principles to be used when allocating funding has promoted good relationships and trust between schools and the LEA. Communication with schools is

good, in particular, through the useful summary for schools of the asset management plan and the termly meetings of the asset management plan advisory group which involves representatives from schools.

144. Nottinghamshire holds detailed information on both the condition and suitability of its schools. The suitability information is in the process of being moderated to ensure school improvement issues are fully reflected in the data. However insufficient work has been done to map out and present the detail of work required and the total resources available at school level.

145. The overall total backlog of repairs is estimated to exceed £112 million. Condition data clearly show that previous levels of investment have not been sufficient to maintain buildings adequately. The level of capital funding has increased significantly from £11 million in 1998/1999 to the current amount of £150 million, although part of this relates to the large Private Finance Initiative project. The LEA is working with schools to ensure all available capital funding is targeted towards priorities in the asset management plan.

Admissions

146. This area was not subject to any detailed fieldwork. The school survey rated admissions as satisfactory and the LEA's own self-evaluation also graded this area as satisfactory. Evidence from documentation and information provided by the LEA demonstrates that support is now highly satisfactory.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

147. Although this area was not subject to substantial fieldwork at the time of the previous inspection, a recommendation was made that the management arrangements for support of pupils who have no school place should improve. Progress has been made in this area and the provision is now satisfactory.

148. The LEA maintains a detailed database of all children who have no school place. This database is updated regularly and in accordance with the LEA's procedures and national guidance and legislation. The data show that the LEA is making every effort to ensure that full-time provision is made available to all pupils who have no school place.

149. Those pupils who are educated at home by their parents receive a minimum of one visit per year from inspectors commissioned to undertake the work on behalf of the advisory and inspection service. All visits result in a written report which is used as a basis of written feedback to parents. The reports are detailed and evaluative. Feedback letters to parents reflect fairly the range of comments made, and in those instances where the provision is judged to be unsatisfactory, letters are clear in the advice and action that the LEA intends to take. This includes further visits from inspectors and, in the more extreme cases, an unequivocal recommendation that the child should be placed in mainstream schooling. Appropriate follow-up action is taken to ensure parental compliance with the recommendations.

150. The provision for teenage parents is satisfactory. All pupils receive between five and 7.5 hours, which is intended to relate to the particular circumstances of each pupil. This allocation supplements other provision made by the pupil's school or home tuition. The LEA has plans to increase the number of hours up to a minimum of ten, in line with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) recommendations.

151. Two local hospitals provide for pupils who, because of illness or injury, are unable to attend their school. The allocation of support for pupils is sensibly based on the medical condition of the child. Three teachers work at these hospitals together with a senior teacher who is head of service. In consultation with the DfES, the LEA decided not to register this provision either separately as a pupil referral unit or hospital school, or as part of an existing pupil referral unit. This means, however, that the service is not subject currently to the same independent inspection procedures that pertain to all other LEA schools and pupil referral units.

Recommendation

In order to improve further the support for pupils educated temporarily in local hospitals the LEA should:

- establish procedures so that the service is subject to rigorous external quality assurance.

152. Home tuition is provided for those pupils who, after leaving hospital, continue to have a medical condition that prevents them from attending school. The majority of pupils receive five hours, but there is a small number who receive more or less. The allocation supplements, when appropriate to medical needs, additional work from the child's mainstream school. This provision of home tuition is satisfactory.

Attendance

153. This area was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and, as a result, the LEA was set the task of improving its policy for attendance, providing advice on attendance strategies, and developing a service management plan that clarified the type of support available for all schools. The LEA has made good progress in all those areas, and is now providing a highly satisfactory level of support to schools.

154. Pupils' attendance since the previous inspection has been satisfactory at both primary and secondary levels. With the exception of 2001, when the attendance at primary level was in line with the averages found nationally and in similar LEAs, the LEA has consistently achieved above the national averages. Attendance at secondary level has remained in line. For the same period, unauthorised absence has generally been below the national average at primary level and in line at secondary level. Unauthorised absence has remained constant in both phases, and currently stands in line with all comparators.

155. The education welfare service has produced separate policy and strategy papers on attendance, which have been approved by elected members. Both papers are linked appropriately to the service level agreement that underpins the work of the education welfare service with schools. The strategy document is, however, too descriptive and less strategic in

its thinking, but, combined with the policy paper, provides sufficient information to inform schools about the type of service provided. The service level agreement is very clear about the role of education welfare officers in supporting schools to improve the attendance of pupils.

156. Good quality attendance data are provided for schools and are also shared with each school's link adviser. In this way, attendance features as part of the ongoing school improvement agenda between schools and the LEA, particularly in relation to the setting of attendance targets. These data are also used effectively by the service to allocate resources to those schools most in need, as an aid to formulating its business plan, and as a measure of its success in achieving the targets set in the EDP. Although some targets were missed in 2002/2003, the service is well placed to continue improving the quality of its support to schools.

157. Links with the police are good and truancy patrols are used well to target specific areas within the authority. The number of patrols that have taken place since the previous inspection is well above the national average and that found in similar LEAs. There is appropriate follow-up action of individual pupils by education welfare service officers, with a higher than national average of referrals and home visits. The number of prosecutions, resulting from poor attendance, is in line with the average found nationally. Appropriate links have also been established with other services for vulnerable children. There are specific education welfare officers for looked after children, an agreement to appoint a specialist education welfare officer for Traveller children, and a service level agreement with the pupil referral units. These initiatives link well to the LEA's targets for greater social inclusion of vulnerable pupils.

Behaviour support

158. The support for behaviour was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA was recommended to deploy its specialist support to reflect more fully the needs of schools, and to improve the provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The LEA has made progress in both these areas and the overall provision is now satisfactory.

159. Since the previous inspection, the number of exclusions has fallen in the secondary sector and increased slightly at primary level, but, overall, these figures have remained in line with the national averages found at secondary level and mostly below those found at primary level.

160. Following the previous inspection, the LEA conducted a detailed audit of its behaviour support for schools, the training needs of specialist support staff and the professional development needs of school staff. The behaviour support plan builds upon this audit, and outlines very clearly the LEA's intentions to manage exclusions and to support those pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour. The plan is detailed and comprehensive, and operates within a clear policy framework for greater social inclusion and links well to the LEA's strategy for special educational needs. Good use is made of data to support the plan, although a relative weakness in the behaviour support plan is that exclusion data are not broken down by phase.

161. The support for permanently excluded pupils has some particular strengths. The response time in dealing with excluded pupils is good. This work is co-ordinated by the local education officer in each of the seven districts and clearly reflects the LEA's inclusion policy, namely, to reintegrate excluded pupils into mainstream education as soon as possible. When this is not possible, the pupil is given a place at one of the pupil referral units to ensure continuity of their educational provision.

162. There are four pupil referral units staffed by teachers from the behaviour support service. Links with schools are clear, with each school's special educational needs co-ordinator linked to a key worker from the pupil referral unit. Support is provided in the mainstream school or at the unit. The provision of training to support behaviour management strategies is satisfactory. Pupils with particularly challenging behaviour are offered a full-time provision at the pupil referral unit, although for some the actual time is less because of their own choosing. The LEA is vigilant in its response to those pupils. Additional support structures for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are also provided. These comprise different intervention programmes relative to the needs of the pupil. Overall, these programmes represent an appropriately differentiated level of support for pupils.

163. Thirty-two secondary schools have developed a learning support unit or its equivalent. Headteachers interviewed during the inspection were generally positive about the effectiveness of these units. There are early indications that attendance has improved and exclusions reduced in a number of these learning support units, although the data are not yet conclusive. Primary schools have been involved in a 'playground peacemaker' scheme, which aims to use peer mediation to resolve conflict. Although the pre-inspection school survey indicated a broad level of satisfaction with behaviour support, interviews held during the inspection with headteachers revealed some variation in the quality and quantity of support provided across the authority.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

164. This area was not previously inspected. The quality of support for health, safety, welfare and child protection is now satisfactory overall, and reflects the pre-inspection school survey, which showed a higher than average rating by primary schools for health and safety support, with all other aspects of this service in line with the ratings found in other LEAs.

165. The support for school health and safety is based within education personnel, with links to other specialist officers when the need arises. A team provides advice directly to schools who have bought into the health and safety service level agreement. The latest percentage figure of 99.5 per cent take-up of the service indicates a high level of satisfaction from schools. A detailed health and safety manual covers a broad range of areas that schools need to be alert to in order to ensure that they comply with health and safety legislation. However, the place of curriculum health and safety is less clear within this document, although advice is given when queries are raised by schools.

166. The LEA's support for welfare and child protection is clear and linked well to other service providers including social services and the area child protection committee. Written guidance on child protection is thorough. Close links have been established between senior officers in education and social services, although there is dissatisfaction from some schools

at the quality of social service support work at school level. The education department, in partnership with social services, is aware of these problems and has recently introduced joint area meetings between headteachers, education and social services' officers. This is an encouraging start, but further work is needed to ensure that the joined up approach at officer level is reflected fully at school level.

167. Training courses are sufficiently varied and relevant to the needs of those who work with children at risk. A register with the names of the designated teacher from each of the LEA's schools is kept up to date. However, while the lead officer in education circulates training information directly to designated teachers, the register is not yet analysed to ensure that all those teachers have attended recent and relevant training. Information from this database is not yet shared with those link advisers who work directly with schools on school improvement issues, which includes support for vulnerable pupils.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for child protection;

- establish monitoring procedures to ensure that all designated teachers have access to and participate in relevant training.

Looked after children

168. This area was previously good and it remains so. At the end of Key Stage 2, the performance of looked after children in English and mathematics is in line with the averages found in similar LEAs and nationally. At Key Stage 4, the percentage of Year 11 children in care who gain five or more GCSE A*- C and A*- G grades is above for both comparators. The percentage of looked after children permanently excluded from school is below for both comparators.

169. Since the previous inspection, a co-ordinator of the local authority's role of corporate parent, funded by social services and line-managed by the advisory and inspection service in education, has been appointed. This has been a crucial appointment for the authority as a whole, but particularly for joint working between education and social services. The appointment has been very successful in raising the profile and awareness of the needs of looked after children at senior officer and elected member levels. The co-ordinator plays a very active role in monitoring those children looked after by Nottinghamshire County Council, and those looked after by other LEAs who currently reside in Nottinghamshire's schools. The good standard of this monitoring is achieved, in part, by the creation of a 'virtual school' for all looked after children. The co-ordinator acts as the headteacher of this 'virtual school' and, in collaboration with the LEA's research and development team, produces a school improvement report which she then uses as a plan of work. This parallels the same process used by other schools in the LEA.

170. County council planning for looked after children is good, with clarity and consistency across the EDP and the Quality Protects management action plan. Targets for raising the levels of attainment of looked after children are realistic and realisable within the life of both plans. A steering group, involving senior officers and elected members monitors the progress of Nottinghamshire's looked after children. This group is effective in overseeing

the general welfare and interests of looked after children, including the establishment of a celebration evening to recognise their achievements. Other initiatives, such as the laptop project which provides all looked after children with a portable computer, and the promotion of book ownership, are also intended to raise the profile and attainment of Nottinghamshire's looked after children.

171. These effective links at senior officer level are not yet fully matched at school level. Clear and effective links between schools and social workers are not yet consistent across the authority. Some headteachers are currently dissatisfied with the quality of support from the social workers who work with their schools. In an effort to improve this situation, each school now has a named social services manager, with whom they can make direct contact when the need arises. The number of completed personal education plans for looked after children, at 57 per cent, is unacceptably low. Links with other specialist services, in particular the education welfare service, are good.

Recommendation

In order to assist the LEA in its support for looked after children:

- work with social services to complete all personal education plans in a timely manner.

Measures to combat racism

172. This aspect was not inspected at the time of the previous inspection. No substantial fieldwork was carried out in this inspection, but analysis of the school survey and the LEA's documentation show that the LEA's current self-evaluation of its effectiveness in combating racism is appropriately rated as highly satisfactory.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Introduction to corporate issues

173. The recent Corporate Assessment⁴ of the local authority by the Audit Commission found Nottinghamshire to be a good council, which has demonstrated its ability to deliver significant improvement in its key priority areas such as education. The current inspection confirms the strength and clarity of the council's corporate vision and its commitment to working with a broad range of partners to raise educational attainment and to tackle social exclusion.

174. In 1999, the previous inspection identified that the approach of the LEA, newly established in 1998 following local government reorganisation, promised better communication with schools, a more focused approach to planning and further improvement in collaborative working. This promise has been delivered, in particular since the appointment of the new director of education in April 2001. Further changes in the leadership of the council and, more recently, of the chief executive, have accelerated the pace of change across the council. The introduction of the medium-term financial strategy has been particularly beneficial to education and is enabling the LEA to deliver much needed changes and to target more effectively its support for vulnerable children and those with special educational needs.

Corporate planning

175. At the time of the last inspection, corporate planning for education was satisfactory. A process of re-shaping and improving the LEA's planning was well under way. Good progress has been made since then and the quality of corporate planning is now good.

176. The council has a long record of prioritising education at the corporate level and has spent above the Standard Spending Assessment on education for many years. Corporate priorities for improvement are approved by the cabinet and the chief officers' management team. The council's strategic plan 'Building a Future: 2001-2005' sets out a clear vision for improvement with common values and agreed priorities which reflect both the national and local agenda. Consultation on the strategic plan has been widespread and its priorities reflect the diverse needs of the county. Learning is one of six priorities in the plan and sets realistic and appropriate targets for improvement, which complement those in the EDP and other key statutory plans. The plan rightly identifies the need to improve basic skills within the county, to raise standards in secondary schools and to improve support for, and the achievement of, pupils with special educational needs. This work within education is supported by a clear framework for joint working across the authority.

177. The council is currently working with the seven district-based local strategic partnerships within the county to develop a community strategy and the associated community plan which is currently in a draft form. Developing sustainable communities and

⁴ Nottinghamshire County Council: Corporate Assessment. December 2002. Audit Commission

promoting equality are central principles within the community strategy. Widespread consultation has taken place, including a survey of 1600 residents, in order to establish the main priorities of the community plan. The part to be played by education within the strategy is clearly represented in the priority 'learning and earning', which recognises the importance of high educational attainment to secure employment opportunities and to build thriving communities. Raising attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, including vocational qualifications, is seen as a priority for improvement.

178. The council's Best Value Performance Plan sets key indicators for corporate performance, which are monitored on a quarterly basis and are well aligned with the county council's strategic plan, the education department strategic plan and the statutory plans for education such as the EDP and the behaviour support plan.

179. Strategic planning within the education directorate is good. The education strategic plan 2001-2004 presents a clear vision for the education service known as 'learning together: achieving success' and builds coherence between corporate objectives and business planning within the education services. This is a good strategic document that draws together all education priorities under six broad aims. The associated activity programmes are clearly linked to performance indicators and targets within existing education plans and strategies, in particular the Education Development Plan. Service planning within the education department has improved and is of a good standard. Corporate and departmental objectives are clearly reflected in these plans which are subject to moderation and feedback by senior officers. Targets and success criteria are generally well focused and measurable, and the financial and human resource implications are identified.

180. The implementation and evaluation of education and corporate plans are good. A clear corporate planning cycle exists that is well supported by a performance reporting framework and a performance information management system, and is managed effectively by the chief officers' management team and the cabinet. The system for implementing corporate plans has been strengthened by management boards, each led by a chief officer, which co-ordinate the implementation of crosscutting corporate priorities. Chief officers are accountable for achieving departmental targets included in the council's strategic plan, which in turn become individual performance management targets. Within the education department, lead officers are identified to move forward activities within the strategic plan and to report regularly on progress. The department has a well established system for monitoring progress on a six-monthly and annual basis.

Decision making

181. The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision making were unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. There has been considerable progress since then and decision making is now good. Some difficult decisions have been taken in a more rigorous and open way, most notably in relation to school place planning and reorganisation and in the Best Value review of special educational needs. These improvements in decision making are fully recognised and welcomed by headteachers.

182. Corporate decisions about budget setting are closely aligned to decisions about improving the quality of services. The introduction of the medium-term financial strategy in

2001, alongside priority setting, has ensured effective targeting of resources to need and enables adjustments to be made to meet new or emerging priorities. A good example of this has been the recent decision to re-allocate additional funding to special educational needs in order to implement the improvements identified by the Best Value review. The debate on this year's budget was fully informed by an understanding of the need to improve performance at Key Stage 4 and in the tuition provided for pupils out of school, and appropriate targets for improvement have been linked to additional funding. Schools value the high levels of delegation.

183. Improving consultation has been a high priority for the director of education and its quality was rated highly by schools in the survey for this inspection. Schools are fully involved in and consulted on the planning and review of the education budget and there is a good understanding among headteachers of the funding needs of the education service arising from the analysis of activity-led funding and budget modelling undertaken by a working group of the LEA's officers and headteachers.

184. The scrutiny of policy decisions within education is effective. Agendas for the education select committee are planned well in advance, issues are given full consideration and decisions are well informed. The committee has scrutinised policy decisions and regularly scrutinises performance on a wide range of the education department's work. Working groups have been set up recently to research policy issues with a focus currently on teacher recruitment and retention and Key Stage 4 performance. Good use has been made of Best Value reviews and external inspection reports.

Leadership of elected members and officers

185. At the time of the last inspection, the quality of leadership provided by elected members was not inspected and that of senior officers was satisfactory. The quality of leadership provided by both elected members and officers is now good.

186. Members of all parties give a high priority to education and are strongly committed to the strategies to raise attainment and to ensure greater inclusion. The vision for education has been strengthened in the council's new strategic plan. Leading members are fully aware of the code of practice on LEA-school relations and seek to promote the autonomy of schools. Through their involvement in a wide range of consultative and review groups, they have a good knowledge and understanding of the issues facing schools. The lead member for education is well regarded by schools and has a strong working relationship with the director and her senior management team. The quality of advice provided for elected members is good, and supports them effectively in decision making, particularly in relation to the recent changes in provision for special educational needs. Elected members are kept well informed of major issues through a variety of means including executive briefings, member seminars, and area meetings of local members led by the lead member for education. The director and her senior officers provide detailed briefings and background information for the leading members within education prior to meetings.

187. Building on the firm foundations of the authority newly established in 1998, the current director of education has made significant progress in the past two years and the quality of her leadership is widely acknowledged by schools. She has a clear vision for

education in the county and a commitment to rigorous self-evaluation as a means of continuously improving the quality of services provided for schools. Under her strong and determined leadership, the partnership with schools and other stakeholders has been significantly strengthened. She is ably supported by her senior management team and together they have a thorough knowledge and understanding of schools and the issues facing the education service.

Partnership

188. The LEA's arrangements for partnership work were highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Since that time, elected members and senior officers have further strengthened their commitment to partnership work and this area of the LEA's work is now good. Corporate guidance on partnership working is being updated as part of the improvement plan following the corporate assessment of the council. The education department has developed a more strategic approach to partnership working, which has been influenced by its strategic plan, the EDP and the current development of a community strategy and local strategic partnership.

189. Positive and productive relationships exist between partners at both the strategic and operational levels and are contributing to the successful outcomes in a number of key partnerships such as the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Sure Start, the Nottinghamshire Association of Governors, the youth offending team and joint work with the police and health authorities. Senior education department personnel contribute to a number of key partnership boards including the two learning partnerships, Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council. Within the council, there are good working links with social services, including effective joint work on the Quality Protects management action plan. The directors of education and social services have responded to concerns raised by schools about the quality of liaison between schools and social workers. Area-based seminars have taken place with headteachers and an action plan has been developed in order to address issues raised by them.

190. The education department has taken clear steps to maximise the benefits of partnership working and to ensure that schools and their communities benefit from regeneration programmes and opportunities for collaborative work with a wide range of partners. The role of the area-based local education officers has been reviewed in order to give greater prominence to this aspect of their work, as part of the EDP priority 'building learning communities' and to support the LEA's involvement in the DfES Extended Schools pathfinder project.

191. The LEA has a strong working relationship with the dioceses on the provision of school places, capital projects and support for schools causing concern. The dioceses are regularly consulted on policy matters. The LEA provides good support for the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education enabling it to take an active stance nationally. Routine liaison with the teacher associations is generally good, particularly in relation to personnel and professional issues.

Support for early years

192. The LEA provides good support for the care and education of young children across a range of settings. Nottinghamshire was in the vanguard in providing nursery education in disadvantaged areas of the county. Since local government reorganisation, elected members have maintained a strong commitment to early years provision as a key element of their social inclusion strategy. The LEA is involved in ten Sure Start programmes and in the delivery of local neighbourhood nurseries. The first early excellence centre is in development.

193. From its inception, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership has worked effectively, focusing on meeting the needs of local communities within the national strategy. The voluntary, independent and private sectors have played their full part, working supportively to improve provision and always willing to challenge practice. There is a very strong partnership between the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and the LEA. Government targets relating to provision for three and four year-olds have been met ahead of time. By 2004, it is intended that every three year-old child whose parents want a place, will have access to early years education reasonably close to their home, normally within two miles.

194. All divisions within the education department work closely with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership to provide a coherent strategy for young children. There are explicit links between the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan and the EDP priority to raise attainment in the early years and in primary schools. Very close working between the partnership officer and the inspector for early years ensures coherence and consistency between their respective teams in a common drive to raise standards. The quality and consistency of provision in both maintained and non-maintained sectors are improving.

195. There is good continuity between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Both national strategy teams have provided good quality training, advice and support to schools where children in the Foundation Stage are taught in mixed-age classes. The provision for these children is subject to the same rigorous level of monitoring and challenge as it is in other key stages.

Support for 14-19 education

196. This area was not previously inspected. The LEA has maintained a high level of involvement in post-16 and Key Stage 4 activities since the time of the previous inspection and support for 14-19 education is now good.

197. There are appropriate references in the EDP to Key Stage 4 and post-16, both of which link directly to the broader 14-19 provision. The major thrust of the activities is the promotion of a flexible Key Stage 4 curriculum, with more vocational opportunities for pupils across the 14-19 age range. The targets for improvement are realistic and generally measurable.

198. The realisation that the LEA needed to assess the post-16 provision in the LEA's schools, in line with national developments, has underpinned its approach to 14-19 education.

Obtaining a consensus among schools and other providers is high on the list of priorities identified by the LEA. To achieve this aim, the LEA and the Learning and Skills Council in partnership, commissioned independent consultants to undertake area reviews in each of the seven districts which make up the county of Nottinghamshire; four reviews have been completed to date. These reviews are of a good quality, and have provided the LEA with information and possible options for the future 14-19 provision in each district that has been reviewed.

199. The LEA has very productive links with local partners; especially the Learning and Skills Council, the Connexions service, local businesses and the further education sector. These partnership links have contributed to the production of a sound 14-19 strategy for pupils in Nottinghamshire. Most schools have signed up to the strategy, and some have already begun to implement activities, which are helping to provide more curricular and vocational opportunities for pupils. One example of this is the recently introduced pilot project in four schools for pre-16 apprenticeships, where joint funding from the DfES and Learning and Skills Council will be linked to traditional post-16 apprenticeships.

200. Elected members are well informed about 14-19 developments. The lead member for education currently sits on a number of 14-19 advisory groups within Nottinghamshire, including a Greater Nottingham group, which combines the City of Nottingham with the county.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

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

In order to improve further the support for pupils educated temporarily in local hospitals the LEA should:

- establish procedures so that the service is subject to rigorous external quality assurance.

In order to improve the support for child protection:

- establish monitoring procedures to ensure that all designated teachers have access to and participate in relevant training.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to assist the LEA in its support for information and communication technology:

- implement fully the actions identified in the EDP, which target the use of ICT in helping to raise standards in all national curriculum subjects.

In order to raise the profile of gifted and talented pupils and to track their progress:

- establish and implement a coherent and comprehensive strategy for schools; and
- provide clear guidance on the identification of these pupils.

In order to identify and share good practice in the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- undertake an in-depth audit in all schools that focuses on outcomes as well as provision; and
- promote the creation of designated co-ordinators in all schools

In order to assist the LEA in its support for looked after children:

- work with social services to complete all personal education plans in a timely manner.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

Name of LEA :	Nottinghamshire
LEA number:	891
Name of Inspector:	Daryl Agnew
Date of Inspection:	May 2003

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	5	
2	The performance of schools	4	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	5	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	2	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	3	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	2	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	2	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	
10	the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	2	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	3	NI
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	1	
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	2	

14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	2	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	3	NI
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	5	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	2	NI
19	Support to school governors	2	NI
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	3	
20a	Financial services	3	NI
20b	Human resources	2	NI
20c	Property services	4	NI
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	4	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	4	
20f	Grounds maintenance	4	
20g	Catering	3	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	3	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	2	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	2	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	2	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	2	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	2	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	2	

28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	2	
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	2	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	3	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	2	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	3	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	3	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	NI
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	4	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	4	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	4	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	2	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	3	NI
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	2	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	2	

45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	2	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	2	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	2	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	2	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	1	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- ☐ Grade 1 – Very good
- ☐ Grade 2 – Good
- ☐ Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- ☐ Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- ☐ Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- ☐ Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- ☐ Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools