



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
MIDDLESBROUGH
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

October 2001

**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1-3
COMMENTARY	4-12
SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA	
Context	13-16
Performance	17-26
Funding	27-31
SECTION 2: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Developments since the last OFSTED inspection	32-37
Changes to council and corporate management structures	38-40
Strategic planning and management	41-51
Performance management and Best Value	52-55
School places and asset management planning	56-57
Recruitment and retention of teachers	58
Excellence in Cities	59-62
SECTION 3: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Progress in implementing the school improvement strategy	63-67
Priority A: raising attainment	68-71
Priority B: enhancing literacy	72-74
Priority C: enhancing numeracy	75-78
Priority D: fulfilling individual needs	79-87
Priority E: promoting information and communication technology	88-90
Priority F: supporting school self-review	91
Priority G: enabling social inclusion	92-95
Priority H: responding to schools causing concern	96-100
SECTION 4: ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LAST INSPECTION	
Recommendation A	101-105
Recommendation B	106-111
Recommendation C	112-117
Recommendation D	118-123
Recommendation E	124-128
Recommendation F	129-133
Recommendation G	134-137
Recommendation H	138-144

SECTION 5: SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) 145-154

Statutory duties 149

School improvement and value for money 150-154

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This report details the findings of a short inspection conducted in June 2001 by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the progress made by the LEA in responding to the findings and recommendations of the previous inspection which took place in 1999.

2. This second inspection has followed up the progress of the LEA in implementing the post-inspection action plan and its education development plan. It also evaluated the progress made by the LEA in supporting central Government initiatives, including Excellence in Cities.

3. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with elected members, strategic partners and focus groups of headteachers and governors. The focus groups tested the views of governors, headteachers and others on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. In addition, discussions were held with the corporate director of education, and staff in Middlesbrough's education department and in other council departments, and with staff of Excellence in Cities. A questionnaire (referred to as the school survey) seeking schools' comments on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 74 per cent. Account was also taken of evidence from other divisions within OFSTED.

COMMENTARY

4. When Middlesbrough was first inspected in 1999, it was emerging from a period of continued and significant change. The report was critical of the wholesale restructuring of management across the council and in the education department, less than two years after its inception. The impact of the LEA in raising standards had been limited by the turbulence of its short history and by low spending on education. The strengths of the LEA were considerable, but so were the weaknesses. The inspection judged that the LEA had made less progress than should be expected and that the LEA was not fulfilling all of its functions satisfactorily. It called for no more false starts.

5. Since the last inspection Middlesbrough has, in fact, been subject to significant further changes in the management and organisation of education. However, these new starts have not been 'false'. They have been necessary, have brought about important improvements and have laid the foundations for further development.

6. Standards in Middlesbrough schools remain below national averages but, in contrast to the previous inspection, have generally risen at a faster rate than nationally. The LEA acknowledges that standards need to rise faster, particularly at Key Stage 3. It is on target to achieve most of the targets set in the Education Development Plan (EDP), though the additional targets which have accompanied additional initiatives will prove very challenging.

7. The council has taken full and effective advantage of national initiatives and funding to provide the additional resources that its schools, pupils and their communities need, and involved itself in developments with strategic partners in the private sector. The resulting financial benefit to the authority has recently enabled the council to commit, quickly, and for the first time, to spending at its full Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for education next year.

8. The appointment of the new corporate director and changes to the senior team in the education directorate have had a significant, and positive, impact on developments and recent progress. Strategic planning is now a real strength and the LEA has made considerable progress in the last year in developing its relationships with schools, in managing the strategic partnerships necessitated by the range of initiatives that impact on education and on schools, and in setting in place secure strategies to raise standards. The strengths of the LEA now significantly outweigh its weaknesses.

9. Progress in implementing the strategy for school improvement set out in the Education Development Plan and in addressing the great majority of the recommendations of the previous report, has generally been satisfactory and in some cases good. Support for social inclusion, monitoring and supporting its schools, particularly those causing concern, and support for literacy and numeracy in primary schools are all carried out well. Arrangements for the deployment of

advisory support and for supporting school self-review, and for better use of data and target-setting in schools, are all promising and have the potential to be equally effective.

10. There has, however, been unsatisfactory progress in implementing its Education Development Plan priority to promote the effective use of information and communications technology (ICT), and in implementing the recommended improvements in delegation arrangements. Although the extent of delegation to schools has exceeded government targets, limited progress has been made in supporting schools in becoming discerning purchasers of services, in work on benchmarking, and in reviewing the funding formula. Work with schools on Best Value is also underdeveloped. Progress in these areas has been partly impeded by the LEA's need to prioritise limited capacity during developments with a private sector strategic partner.

11. The shared vision and commitment of senior officers and elected members, and the clear focus on education as the key to the authority's wider social and regeneration and social strategies, are impressive. Headteachers and governors recognise and largely applaud the LEA's actions to improve education and support schools. They welcome the developing partnerships that initiatives such as the Education Action Zone (EAZ) and Excellence in Cities (EiC) are encouraging. The LEA has defined very clearly its role and the partnership it wishes to have with schools. They, and all other stakeholders need to commit themselves to the collective responsibility that partnership brings if the challenges for Middlesbrough are to be effectively met.

12. The LEA has demonstrated that it can improve rapidly. However, it must not allow its ambition to overtake the necessary pace of change. A number of developments are still new and some strategies, though well planned, have still to be fully implemented. There is secure evidence that they should be effective, but they need time to have an impact. The LEA will need to look carefully at its capacity to take on many more initiatives if it is not to put at risk the improvements that it believes will accrue from current developments. Nevertheless, we are confident of the LEA's ability to improve further and to respond to the recommendations in this report.

SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

Context

13. Middlesbrough continues to be characterised by very significant areas of deprivation. On the basis of local concentrations of multiple deprivation, it is the most deprived district in the country. Levels of unemployment are still more than double the national average. The school population has fallen slightly since the last inspection to 21,993. Significantly more pupils continue to be entitled to free school meals than nationally (34.5 per cent in primary schools and 35.8 per cent in secondary schools, compared with national averages of 19.7 per cent and 17.6 per cent, respectively). The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in schools (7.5 per cent) and with statements of special educational needs are broadly in line with national averages.

14. Middlesbrough now maintains 47 primary schools, 11 secondary schools, and four special schools (one fewer than at the time of the last inspection). Ninety-five per cent of children start their education in nursery units attached to primary schools, a figure still well above the national average. Approximately 21 per cent of pupils are educated in voluntary aided Roman Catholic (RC) schools. The closure of one RC secondary school, and two LEA maintained secondary schools, has been approved for 2002, the latter to create a new city academy. A significant number of Year 7 pupils (14 per cent) do not transfer to maintained secondary schools in the LEA. The LEA's data indicates that approximately ten per cent of its more able pupils do not join its secondary schools at the end of Year 6.

15. Apart from one maintained special school; all other post-16 provision is through the further education sector, and Macmillan City Technology College (CTC). The CTC is a Beacon School, and an affiliated specialist school. As part of developments under the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative, a second Beacon school and a specialist college for performing arts are approved to start in September 2001. Two further specialist colleges for sport and technology are planned through EiC. A primary Beacon school is in place and a second has gained approval for September 2001.

16. The Education Action Zone continues to operate in the east Middlesbrough area and, as part of Excellence in Cities, two small EAZs, involving eight schools in the south and 12 schools in the centre of the borough are scheduled to start in September 2001.

Performance

17. Performance remains below national averages in all key stages but, apart from Key Stage 3, is in line with similar LEAs. In contrast to the previous inspection, the rate of improvement, again except at Key Stage 3, is now generally above that nationally. In Middlesbrough, there is a more pronounced dip in performance between Key Stages 2 and 3 than found nationally. Standards in science are low

from Key Stage 2 onwards, and improvement in this subject is below that nationally in all key stages.

18. At Key Stage 1, attainment in reading and writing tests is below the national average, but in line with similar LEAs. Attainment in mathematics and science is broadly in line with that nationally and in similar LEAs. Rates of improvement vary considerably, however. Improvement is above average in English, although boys have not made sufficient progress in reading in recent years and their performance declined from 1999/2000. Improvement in mathematics is faster than average, but there has been deterioration in attainment in science, particularly amongst boys.

19. At Key Stage 2, attainment in all three subjects is below average but in line with similar LEAs. The rate of improvement in English and mathematics has kept pace with that nationally, but was slower than nationally and in similar LEAs in science.

20. GCSE results are still well below national averages, but the average points score (APS) per pupil and the percentage proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A*-C is now broadly in line with comparable authorities. Better progress has been made in the last two years than nationally in improving APS and in the proportion of pupils gaining one or more A*-C and five or more A*-C grades. Nevertheless, performance across schools varies considerably and, rightly, the LEA is prioritising support to four schools where performance needs to rise most rapidly.

21. Least progress has been made at Key Stage 3. Attainment is well below average in mathematics and science, and rates of improvement are slower than average for both subjects. English fares better however: attainment remains below average, but faster progress has been made than nationally and in similar LEAs.

22. At current rates of improvement, the LEA's 2002 performance target for Key Stage 2, and the original GCSE targets in the Educational Development Plan (EDP) should be achievable. However, the additional GCSE targets (six per cent) set by EiC, constitute a significant additional challenge. It will also require a substantial quickening in the pace of improvement if Key Stage 3 targets for mathematics and science are to be achieved.

23. The performance of boys and girls varies markedly across key stages. In contrast to the position nationally, girls do not consistently out-perform boys. The LEA has, sensibly, prioritised action to improve the progress of boys in all key stages in its EDP and in the new integrated plan for education (IPE) and has targeted action to improve the performance of girls as part of its overall strategy to improve standards in secondary science. Statistics also indicate that performance in science needs to improve in primary.

24. OFSTED inspections show that the percentage of Middlesbrough schools judged to be good or very good has improved since the last inspection, in line with the national trend. The percentage of primary schools in these categories (66 per cent) is in line with that nationally and in comparable authorities. The percentage of

secondary schools (50 per cent) is below the national average, but is generally above comparable LEAs. Standards remain the main area of comparative weakness in secondary schools, but, in both phases, the management and climate of schools scores comparatively highly. Overall, 30 per cent of schools require improvements, in line with that nationally.

25. Rates of attendance in primary and secondary schools are in line with comparable LEAs, but remain below the national average in primary and, stubbornly, well below national average in secondary schools. Levels of unauthorised absence are in line with national figures in primary schools, but remain just above the LEA's target. Levels in secondary schools continue to be above that nationally, but are below the LEA's own target and lower than in comparable authorities. Exclusion rates are below national figures in both phases, and in secondary schools continue to be well below rates in comparable LEA's.

26. At the time of the first inspection, two schools were judged to require special measures and six schools had serious weaknesses. The position has improved substantially, and there are now no schools in special measures and only one with serious weaknesses.

Funding

27. The previous inspection was critical of Middlesbrough's funding of education. Whilst its education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil significantly exceeds the averages for its statistical neighbours (by 2.2 per cent), unitary authorities (by 7.5 per cent) and English local education authorities (by 5.7 per cent), until 2000/2001 the council had continued to spend well below its education SSA (96 per cent).

28. However, funding for schools has now improved considerably. In 2001/2002 the council has increased its budget for education by £1.3 million above the increase in SSA, to spend at 97.5 per cent of the education SSA. It has secure plans to spend at the level of SSA in 2002/2003. In addition, Middlesbrough has attracted substantial income from a wide range of externally funded activity. In 2001/2002 this amounted to £14.5 million (equivalent to an enhancement of 20 per cent on top of the education SSA). The authority considers that two-thirds of its schools benefit directly from access to the additional funding.

29. In 2001/2002 Middlesbrough is exceeding the Government's spending targets and is more than fully passing on the increase in SSA and increasing pupil funding by 10.8 per cent (compared with the minimum expectation of five per cent). The level of delegation has increased rapidly in recent years and is 86.7 per cent of the local schools budget (LSB) in 2001/2002, and now marginally exceeds the unitary and national averages.

30. Individual school budget (ISB) shares per pupil for primary schools were below English authorities' and statistical neighbours' averages in 2000/2001, but broadly in line with averages for other unitary authorities. The average secondary

ISB per pupil exceeds statistical neighbours', and the average for unitary and English authorities as a whole. Additional expenditure in 2001/2002 has been focused at Key Stage 2.

£ per pupil (Middlesbrough as %)	Primary Funding	Secondary Funding
Middlesbrough	1,821	2,678
Statistical Neighbours	1,841 (98.9%)	2,534 (105.7%)
Unitary	1,807 (100.8%)	2,524 (106.1%)
England	1,869 (97.4%)	2,559 (104.7%)

31. Centrally retained expenditure shown in the section 52 statement for Middlesbrough in 2000/2001 (£418 per pupil) was below the levels in statistical neighbours (£437 per pupil), unitary authorities (£427 per pupil) and English authorities (£446 per pupil). However, because of the inclusion of the costs of joint provision for special educational needs (SEN) in the approach adopted by Middlesbrough in its section 52 statement, the actual figure was substantially less than in other authorities. The authority is not rigorous enough in its use of comparative information to inform policy deliberations. This is particularly apparent in SEN policy development.

Recommendation

- More effective and rigorous use should be made of comparative information on levels of council spending, from a wider range of sources, in order to better inform policy deliberations and decisions.

SECTION 2: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Developments since the last inspection

32. The previous inspection was critical of decisions to undertake wholesale restructuring of management across the council and in the education department after less than two years, judging this had adversely impacted on the degree of progress that should have been made. OFSTED identified the need for continuing political backing, and consistency in LEA and corporate structures.

33. Since 1999 there have been a number of further changes to the structure and leadership of the LEA, and in the provision for schools. Some changes have been caused by circumstance, many by external factors and developments in national education policy; others by the LEA's and schools' efforts to secure additional funding and resources, in order to improve the quality and standards of education.

34. The authority has now successfully attracted funding from four phases of initiatives funded by the Single Regeneration Budget. It has entered into a substantial Public Private Partnership (PPP) to deliver a range of its services, and is in the process of implementing a health improvement action plan. It has successfully bid for New Deal for communities funding for west Middlesbrough, including a small Education Action Zone, and now has Sure Start provision in east and central Middlesbrough. The LEA has also just successfully completed a major reorganisation of special school provision.

35. In addition to the Education Action Zone and Excellence in Cities provision outlined in paragraphs 15 and 16, a city learning centre (CLC) is to open in September 2001, and EiC is supporting the development of a total of two Beacon schools and three specialist schools by 2003.

36. Middlesbrough is one of the authorities piloting the introduction of public service agreements (PSA) in 12 performance areas from April 2001. The PSA includes four specific enhanced targets for education and will affect 15 targeted schools across the borough: tackling regular non-attenders and improving truancy, raising attainment in literacy at Key Stage 1, raising GCSE attainment for underachieving groups of minority ethnic boys, and raising the GCSE attainment of children in public care.

37. The LEA has also successfully piloted the introduction of the education maintenance allowance (EMA), designed to encourage post-16 staying on rates, and is now integrating these initiatives into its excellence challenge programme, as part of EiC. A successful local 'meteor' programme, run in liaison with University of Teeside, has provided mentoring support for pupils in Years 6-8 across 22 schools and helped to raise the educational aspirations of young people and to provide early experience of higher education. From next year neighbourhood renewal funding will also target raising educational standards, mirroring the four PSA areas, plus developing the meteor and Excellence in Cities programmes for 13-16 year-olds by supporting student mentors to help tackle boys' underachievement.

Changes to council and corporate management structures

38. Since the last inspection there has been a further change in the leadership of the education directorate, with a new corporate director in post since September 2000. In the interim, between the departure of the previous director and the new director taking up post, the council revised the corporate management structure. The new structure now has five corporate directorates under the chief executive, covering: corporate services; social services; education; regeneration, housing and culture; and environment.

39. The work of the education directorate is now more specifically focused on schools' standards, inclusion and delivery of core LEA responsibilities. Directorates generally work effectively together to deliver their individual and corporate responsibilities. However, liaison between the regeneration and education directorates over provision for early years has not operated effectively enough, and schools have not received sufficient guidance or curriculum support for the implementation of the foundation curriculum.

40. The model of local government, with a leader and cabinet, being implemented at the time of the last inspection, has been regularly, and effectively, reviewed and evaluated. Appropriate changes have been put in place, for example in extending the cabinet from ten to 12 to encompass new portfolios linked to the authority's community strategy. As a result of a recent community survey, the council is to hold a referendum on a revised model, for an elected mayor and cabinet. Scrutiny procedures are sound, and there are appropriate arrangements for ensuring accountability in the council's own work and the work of officers.

Recommendation

- liaison between directorates in supporting early years is strengthened to provide more coherent support for schools, particularly in guidance and support for the foundation curriculum.

Strategic planning and management

41. Strategic planning and management of the range of initiatives in the LEA is now a strength. Key corporate plans, including the council's prospectus and the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) form a sufficiently clear and comprehensive strategic framework for the work of the council and its services. They form a sound basis for meeting the challenges facing Middlesbrough. Education, and education targets feature centrally within this corporate agenda.

42. Middlesbrough has a clear strategy to ensure that its spending overall on education will match the education SSA by 2002/2003. The council has taken radical measures in response to acknowledged problems of under-funding of education, uneven quality of services and a poor information and communication technology infrastructure and has undertaken major restructuring and realignment of the delivery of its activities.

43. The process of seeking and securing a private sector strategic partner to whom to transfer the bulk of its support services has resulted in freeing an additional £2 million per year over the next ten years, the bulk of which is programmed to support spending at education SSA. Nevertheless, the outsourcing exercise has taken time and in the short-term has adversely affected the capacity of the education service in some key areas. There has been insufficient progress in work on the formula for distributing funding to school budgets, and decisions by schools and the LEA are not sufficiently informed by the use of comparative benchmarked data.

44. The LEA has been selected by the cabinet office to be part of a small pilot project on streamlining strategic planning. The decision to base this work on the existing EDP priorities, plus a new priority of 'partnership and coherence', has helped to ensure continuity and consistency. The resulting integrated plan for education (IPE) provides a clear and straightforward synopsis of education's contributions to corporate priorities and actions to secure social, economic and physical regeneration. Links with key plans and initiatives in other directorates are clear and the plan sets out clearly management responsibilities, school and other education stakeholder involvement, and contributions to school improvement across 29 key plans and initiatives.

45. The integrated plan for education contains a concordat between the LEA and schools which very clearly defines respective roles and accountabilities in line with the Code of Practice for LEA/School Relations. This has been the subject of appropriate consultation with all stakeholders. It includes some challenging targets for the LEA to deliver key areas of support, as well as clear and sensible markers for the range of services it can deliver. Most significantly, schools' role in supporting the LEA in delivery of this 'contract' are clearly set out.

46. External evaluation of the post OFSTED action plan commissioned by the new director was justifiably critical of the clarity of actions and timelines, and its impact on the work of the service and delivery of core tasks. Actions have been reviewed and tightened as part of the development of the integrated plan for education (IPE). This has contributed significantly to recent improvements in tackling the recommendations from the previous inspection, and in improving progress where actions had not been effective.

47. Activities to deliver the IPE are generally well planned, although not all activities specific to initiatives such as Excellence in Cities are fully integrated into overarching strategies. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation of the IPE are clear and sufficiently robust. They have been reinforced by initial developments in service planning and performance management in the education directorate's senior team service plan (STSP). However, the structure of project management is not sufficiently clear and benchmark indicators for performance by services are not presented consistently or clearly enough.

48. The new corporate director for education has brought a sharper focus to co-ordinating and managing the work of the LEA and its delivery of corporate priorities.

She has restructured the education directorate to create a more coherent policy and planning framework; clearer roles for senior staff and advisers; and made line management and accountability clearer. In an unusual move, the directors of the Education Action Zone and Excellence in Cities have become members of the senior management team. New appointments have brought two new heads of service into the team, resulting in a more effective management structure covering standards, inclusion, planning and information, Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zone.

49. The director and senior officers provide good leadership. The new structure is better focused on delivery of core tasks and targets, and has brought much-needed secondary management expertise to the team (a recommendation from the previous inspection that had proved difficult to meet by other strategies). It has also been influential in improving the liaison and co-ordination between major initiatives, particularly in developing more effective liaison between the LEA and the Education Action Zone; helping to contribute to improvements in the performance of the Zone. Partnerships, and action across services and agencies involved in the range of corporate and educational initiatives are generally well co-ordinated and effectively managed. Partnerships with the EAZ, higher and further education and with business are strong. Excellence in Cities has helped to improve partnerships within schools.

50. Elected members and the chief executive provide firm leadership and undertake their strategic role vigorously. They have a clear vision and plans for the development of Middlesbrough and the role that education plays within the corporate agenda. They have taken some radical steps to attract the additional funding and initiatives that are key to providing the additional resources to support schools in delivering this agenda. For the most part, decisions on education are sufficiently well informed.

51. Consultation procedures have improved and the views of schools and stakeholders are increasingly taken account of. Nevertheless, some actions have not always been managed with sufficient sensitivity. A significant number of schools continue to have criticisms of the extent to which their views are taken into account in the development of policies and initiatives that increasingly impact on them and the targets they have to deliver. Despite recent improvements, the council needs to continue to communicate clearly the reasons for embracing sources of funding and partnership with the private sector, and its vision for the resulting pattern of education in Middlesbrough, if it is to carry with it the schools and teachers on whom it depends to deliver improvement.

Recommendations

- The council should extend its work with stakeholders to:
 - articulate more clearly the rationale for current strategies to improve educational provision and funding; and
 - model more clearly the outcomes of its vision and the resulting pattern of schooling across the borough, and the impact this will have on services and on continuing initiatives.

Performance management and Best Value

52. Performance management has improved since the last inspection. Middlesbrough is doing much to develop a strong performance management culture and to build upon existing appraisal and personal review and development systems. To date, there has been less work undertaken on linking and tracking the allocation of resources to identified actions, and the measurements of outcomes, although a new post has now been created with this as part of its responsibilities.

53. The council has adopted the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model as the basis for its performance management. It is seeking to extend and enhance the model to ensure secure links with outcome measures and strategic objectives. Staff across the council are being trained as EFQM assessors, and realistic plans are in place to implement the model in full over the next eighteen months. The council also successfully used the EFQM model in the procurement process to select a strategic partner in the transfer of operational and support services.

54. The council has prioritised education based Best Value reviews for the second year of its five-year programme. Nevertheless, partly as a consequence of its involvement in transferring support services to its strategic partner, the council's Best Value review activity in education has been limited. Work with schools on applying the principles of Best Value is underdeveloped. Schools return statements on how they will apply the principles of Best Value with their budget statements, but these are seen more as necessary routine, and scrutiny and challenge by the local authority is superficial. New guidance to heighten the awareness of schools has very recently been prepared.

55. The support given to schools to use comparative benchmarking information to inform resourcing decisions is also limited. The school budget formula generates small blocks of money equivalent to the costs of the service which the schools are then invited to buy; this has been an impediment to creating a culture of greater autonomy. The council rightly recognises its role in supporting and challenging schools to become discerning and autonomous purchasers of services. However, there is not yet a clearly articulated approach to how it will undertake this function, in light of the transfer of both traded and strategic support services to its private sector strategic partner.

School places and asset management

56. These two areas are strategically managed within the same section of the education service and the council's performance has been mixed, reflecting, in part, the strain on its capacity. The education service has vigorously addressed the combined issues of surplus places and poor standards in secondary education through: reorganisation; the closure of three schools; and the associated establishment of a city academy in East Middlesbrough in 2002. Further secondary sector reorganisation linked to a second city academy and amalgamation of infant and junior schools to reduce surplus places are being considered. An appropriately

focused and major special school reorganisation has just been successfully completed.

57. However, the council has fallen badly behind in one element of its timetable for implementing its asset management planning in education. It has failed to satisfy the DfES about the accuracy of its condition survey information, which has needed to be re-submitted. This has added further to workloads. The failure has been partly due to difficulties encountered over the use of software, but also as a result of an unsatisfactory deployment of corporate staff, insufficient co-ordination within the council, poor management of expectations and consultation about changing roles.

Recommendation

- The council should ensure it has sufficient staff capacity to meet all its objectives.

Recruitment and retention of teachers

58. Middlesbrough has similar difficulties in recruitment and retention to those found nationally. Shortages of teachers are more pronounced in the secondary than the primary sector and there is also a shortage of supply teachers. The LEA has been actively addressing the problem and is implementing a good range of strategies to improve teacher supply. It has appointed a recruitment strategy manager and has set up a recruitment strategy management group, comprising headteachers, union representatives, further education professionals and teacher training service providers. A PGCE course is being planned with Teesside University, catering for at least 20 graduate teachers from 2002. In the meantime, the LEA is working with Macmillan College, which has successfully obtained Training School status, on more employment-based routes into teaching and other types of qualification. Good links have been set up with Lancashire and Portsmouth LEAs to explore good practice, and effective use is being made of national incentives to attract former teachers and other targeted groups into the profession, whether as full-time or supply teachers. A number of appointments have been made in this way in recent months.

Excellence in Cities

59. Middlesbrough is part of the second phase of the national Excellence in Cities initiative. The EiC partnership was established jointly by the LEA and secondary schools in March 2000, and has been implementing the initiative since September 2000. EiC is central to the LEA's strategy for supporting school improvement and has been effectively integrated into overall planning and delivery of corporate and education strategies. The EiC partnership plan benefited from good co-operation between the LEA and headteachers in its development, particularly in the audit of needs. The allocations of resources are clearly identified, appropriately aligned to priorities, suitably weighted to support the planned programme, and sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of individual schools. Actions are sufficiently clearly defined and timetabled.

60. All seven strands of the initiative are planned for, and the timetable for implementation is generally on time. There has been some slippage in the

programme to support gifted and talented pupils. The appointment of learning mentors (LM) has been particularly effective and is well integrated with the LEA's existing support to promote social inclusion and improve attendance and reduce exclusions. It is too soon to judge any significant impact on standards, though early entry to GCSE has already exceeded initial targets and the number of exclusions has halved.

61. There is a good spirit of partnership amongst the schools, other agencies and with the LEA. Headteachers are enthusiastic about the developments and confident that they will be effective. Liaison with Macmillan City Technology College (CTC) is particularly impressive. The college is not funded from EiC, but shadows and, very effectively, supports strategies, including the development of the CLC, the Beacon and specialist schools' programme, and dissemination of good practice.

62. The recent appointment of the EiC director and co-ordinators to manage the core strands of support for gifted and talented and learning mentors in schools, is beginning to have an impact. The recent development of clearer remits for the partnership board, steering group and focus groups by the EiC director provide a sound basis for monitoring and evaluating the Excellence in Cities initiatives. Initiatives have been welcomed by schools and have developed rapidly. However, this has not always taken place against a sufficiently clear framework of specifications and guidance from the partnership, drawn from the EiC plan and its strategies for implementation, and agreed as a basis for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan and schools' use of EiC resources.

Recommendation

- The Excellence in Cities partnership, including the LEA, should agree a clearer contract for implementation of initiatives, a more rigorous methodology for monitoring and evaluation, and the collective actions the partnership will take to ensure that commitments to resourcing and implementation identified in the Excellence in Cities Plan are met.

SECTION 3: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Progress in implementing the school improvement strategy

63. The previous inspection judged the Education Development Plan (EDP) to be sound and the priorities it identified to support school improvement were relevant. They were:

- A raising attainment;
- B enhancing literacy;
- C enhancing numeracy;
- D fulfilling individual needs;
- E promoting information and communications technology (ICT);
- F supporting school self-review;
- G enabling social inclusion; and
- H responding to schools causing concern.

64. The last inspection identified the need to improve the criteria for monitoring and evaluation in the EDP. A lack of precision in the criteria for success for some activities has made their progress more difficult to measure and adversely affected their implementation. However, the audit and review of progress in EDP activities undertaken during the development of the integrated plan for education (IPE) recognised these shortfalls and effectively refocused existing EDP work to address emerging areas of weakness and inconsistent progress.

65. As a result, overall progress in implementing the EDP priorities has been highly satisfactory. Good progress has been made with regard to literacy and social inclusion, and satisfactory progress made in other priorities apart from ICT, where it is unsatisfactory.

66. The integrated plan for education has effectively subsumed the EDP whilst maintaining essential consistency in the overall strategy for school improvement. As such, the EDP has been improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. The integrated plan for education has also identified several relevant new activities, for example, tackling poor performance in secondary science and underachievement of boys and by specific groups of minority ethnic pupils.

67. Schools surveyed confirmed this view. Overall, schools in both phases rate the relevance of LEA priorities in the top 25 per cent of all LEAs and register a significant improvement in their views on the clarity of the LEA's strategy for school improvement.

Priority A: raising attainment

68. The LEA set itself four activities within this priority area: improving teaching and learning; monitoring and evaluating pupil performance; improved transfer of data

between primary and secondary schools; and developing leadership and management.

69. Overall, the LEA has made sound progress in executing most parts of this priority. As reported in the section on performance, and in the following sections on literacy and numeracy, standards are generally rising. Nevertheless the LEA acknowledges they need to rise faster and is determined to tackle underachievement. It has well considered strategies in the integrated plan for education to do so. More widely, the LEA and school staff, local politicians and representatives of local industry and commerce are involved in a variety of activities to raise the profile of education in the borough and the expectations of pupils and their parents. These include public events to celebrate achievements; forging links between pupils and employers; and helping parents who had negative experiences of schooling to improve basic skills, for example, through the Sure Start programme.

70. Progress in the first activity has kept pace with the planned timescale. The training programme for practising teachers has been revised to bring it into line with the integrated plan for education; a good teaching and learning policy has been drafted and circulated to schools, but there has been insufficient time for it to become embedded in practice. Advisers conduct lesson observations for specific reasons and give clear feedback to help teachers to improve.

71. Progress in monitoring and evaluating pupil performance has been satisfactory. It has been hindered by difficulties in recruiting specialists and acquiring appropriate software, but these are now resolved. A useful central database is nearing completion and virtually all schools have been trained in its use. Headteachers regard this training highly. Inevitably, progress in transferring data between primary and secondary schools has been slowed by the pace of the second activity. However, the LEA is now ready to transfer of Year 6 data effectively at the end of the current academic year. Progress in developing leadership and management has been sound overall, especially given the training provided through such schemes as the National Literacy Standard (NLS).

Recommendation

- The implementation of the teaching and learning policy should be carefully monitored, in conjunction with schools, in order to support teachers to embed this into their practice.

Priority B: enhancing literacy

72. The LEA set itself three priorities in its support for literacy: the implementation of the National Literacy Standard (NLS); the development of joint initiatives with libraries, adult education and the wider community; and the establishment of further support opportunities, such as summer schools. Impressive progress has been made in each strand of activity.

73. The NLS is being implemented very effectively. There is a strong partnership with the EAZ and a combined literacy team meets weekly to discuss progress and

strategies. A well-led, highly motivated literacy support team is delivering an extensive training program. Each tranche of NLS training is being evaluated by teachers and monitored by the advisory service and course evaluations are extremely positive. Leading teachers have begun offer twilight sessions in schools. Increasingly, Key Stage 3 teachers of English are visiting Year 6 classrooms to observe methodology and standards attained. The advisory team have received good training in order to monitor literacy in schools.

74. Summer schools have been well organised, and family literacy courses have been successful. Links with adult education are strong and accreditation has been established for the adult learners through the Open College Network. The 'better reading partnership' with the EAZ has been extended from Year 1 pupils to Year 7, and a flourishing support study centre based in the Middlesbrough football club runs successful literacy initiatives. The original EDP priority had insufficient focus on secondary, but major effort has gone into extensive and good quality planning for the recent launch and implementation of the Key Stage 3 (KS3) strategy.

Priority C: enhancing numeracy

75. The LEA identified three main activities to deliver this priority: implementation of the National Numeracy Standard (NNS); identifying and promoting opportunities for work relating to commerce, business, industry and communities and developing family numeracy; and providing a programme of summer schools and other study support. Overall, this priority is now being implemented effectively. However, the original EDP priority had limited focus on improving standards in secondary schools and activities designed to improve support for secondary education have, until recently, not been implemented successfully.

76. Progress in supporting numeracy at primary level and in the implementation of the NNS has been good. The LEA's work in piloting the strategy a year early has paid dividends. The strategy has been well-led and very effectively managed by the LEA's numeracy team and, as with literacy, has been significantly enhanced by the very successful integration of the LEA's literacy and numeracy teams, effective partnership with the EAZ, and good training for advisors in order to monitor and support numeracy in schools. The LEA has, of its own volition, raised its 2002 KS2 target, based on the increased aggregate of school targets and growing confidence in its strategy. If the overall trend of improvement is maintained the LEA is on track to achieve its target.

77. The LEA's progress in implementing the other two strands of activity has been patchier. The LEA's targets for the programme of summer schools have been met; recent national initiatives have helped to put its development of other study support back on track; and developments in family numeracy will be significantly enhanced by recent funding from the basic skills agency. Recent developments in the LEA's data analysis provide a sound basis for targeting support to raise standards, and to implement activities aimed at ensuring more successful transition between Year 6-Year 7. However, activities designed to increase opportunities for work related

learning and the application of numeracy for secondary pupils have made no significant progress.

78. The national Key Stage 3 (KS3) numeracy strategy has now been successfully launched and the LEA has produced good plans for its implementation and associated training for teachers. The LEA has calculated, quite reasonably, that the increased levels of attainment of Year 7 pupils entering secondary schools will raise standards, and expect that the KS3 strategy will have a similar impact on the rate of improvement as the NNS. This would have enabled the LEA to approach its original KS3 target for 2002. However, the LEA's enhanced target as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative is extremely challenging and, on present evidence, is unlikely to be achieved.

Priority D: fulfilling individual needs

79. The Education Development Plan (EDP) established five priorities: enhancing opportunities for pupils with special educational needs; enhancing provision for more able and talented pupils; ensuring full access to learning for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL); recognising gender differences and promoting equality of opportunity; and developing personal skills, values and citizenship.

80. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement in all five areas. Progress had been delayed in those areas pending the availability of better pupil data. However, the LEA is now providing clear and readily usable data sets for schools with prior attainment differentiated by gender, ethnicity and subject, and training in its use has already taken place. Support to raise standards amongst boys and, in particular, minority ethnic groups is also effectively built into developments in the integrated plan for education and Public Service Agreement (PSA).

81. Extensive work has been carried out to extend opportunities for more able and talented pupils, with some success. Evidence of the impact of these initiatives is still mixed: targets for early entry for GCSE set by EiC have been exceeded, but the percentage of Year 6 pupils achieving Level 6 plus has not increased significantly; two conferences and a science course have had to be cancelled for lack of support.

82. Existing LEA guidelines on supporting more able and talented children are too tentative. Updated guidance to be published in September will contain a teaching and learning framework for gifted and talented children, which will enable schools to refine and improve their enrichment programmes. However, the EiC partnership needs to ensure that LEA guidance is integrated effectively into EiC provision and used to improve the current criteria for identifying these pupils. Programmes for more gifted and talented pupils, developed through EiC, are due to be shared with other schools as part of the focus on science in the 2001 summer schools. The Beacon schools will begin dissemination of good practice across the LEA in September.

83. Provision for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is sound and has been improved by the appointment of a full-time co-ordinator since September

2000. Primary schools have also been receiving support from a half-time support teacher to help them to revise their programmes of work. A working group of LEA officers and headteachers has been established to review provision, and better data will enable the LEA to target provision more effectively. An interesting and unusual refugee support service provides a secure and welcoming environment for refugee children.

84. Slippage in achieving the targets in the development of personal skills, values and citizenship can be attributed to long term adviser illness and to a number of key staff changes. Nevertheless, overall progress to date has been satisfactory and has included, for example, a well attended conference on citizenship.

85. On the wider front, the authority's strategy for combating racism is beginning to be well co-ordinated, and there are good links between services and departments. The recently appointed head of corporate strategy leads the council's diversity strategy. A draft diversity policy has just been agreed by cabinet and a new full time post of diversity strategy officer, is currently being recruited to promote and co-ordinate a number of existing initiatives.

86. The corporate director of environment works closely with the LEA's head of inclusion, one of whose team has specific responsibility for racism issues in the school context. However, the LEA's attempts to draw representative secondary and primary heads onto cross-council and cross-agency anti-racism groups have not always been successful. The LEA has accepted the recommendations of the Macpherson Report and has formulated an action plan. Schools have their own anti-racism policies and have received some training. The council should reach its target to gain Level 1 of the race equality standards by the end of this year and Level 2 by the end of 2002.

87. Progress with regard to special educational needs (SEN) is reported fully in section five of this report.

Recommendations

- the pace of developments in personal skills, values and citizenship in schools should be improved; and
- the Excellence in Cities partnership should ensure that LEA guidance on support for gifted and talented pupils is integrated effectively into Excellence in Cities provision and used to improve the current criteria for identification.

Priority E: promoting information and communication technology

88. The LEA identified three strands of activity to deliver this priority: installing and operating the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), establishing a minimum information and communication technology (ICT) entitlement for pupils reflecting National Curriculum (NC) requirements, and creating a pupil related database for attendance, special educational needs and assessment. Progress on the first strand has been satisfactory, but the LEA acknowledges that overall development has fallen behind schedule and been limited in scope. The LEA recovery plans are now in place.

89. The LEA has concentrated, successfully, on the provision and installation of computer hardware in schools and on an extensive training programme. However, the council's approach to the development of comprehensive ICT systems for schools has lacked consistency. Technician support has been weak and insufficient to meet schools' needs. Schools do not yet fully understand procurement arrangements. They have been rightly disappointed by the slow progress by the council in establishing an integrated ICT infrastructure.

90. The overall ICT strategy for education, although recently revised and in the process of being consulted upon with the relevant advisory group, has yet to be communicated to schools as a whole. There are plans to launch the strategy in the Autumn. Absence and illness have also impeded progress; monitoring of the use of information and communication technology in the curriculum is limited, and moderated assessment of application and performance is unsatisfactory. The LEA has now reorganised its structure to provide greater coherence. Good working relationships have been set up with EAZ staff and these should provide the basis for improved monitoring and raising of standards in the schools in future.

Recommendation

- the emphasis of the information and communication technology teams should move from training to planned evaluation and monitoring, to ensure pupils' minimum information and communication technology entitlement is delivered, existing standards are defined more precisely, and provision and support are better targeted; and
- the council should ensure that support for information and communication technology, including administrative and technical support, is sufficient to meet the needs of schools and education services.

Priority F: supporting school self-review

91. The previous inspection recommended improvements in this area of the LEA's work; it is therefore dealt with in more detail in section four (Recommendation H).

Priority G: enabling social inclusion

92. The LEA set itself five areas of activity to achieve this priority: promoting attendance; developing a more relevant curriculum for life; promoting partnerships with other agencies; raising the aspirations of pupils and their families; and promoting good behaviour.

93. The previous inspection recommended that the LEA improve its support for attendance; developments are, therefore, dealt with in more detail in section four (Recommendation G). However, significant progress has been made in this, and the other four areas of activity. Some of the LEA's aims for social inclusion will, necessarily, take time to achieve fully. Raising the aspirations of children and their families, in particular, cannot happen overnight. Good behaviour, on the other hand,

is achievable in the shorter term; headteachers already report significant improvement.

94. The authority has produced an excellent inclusion policy and the newly established multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) are putting the policy into practice very effectively. The multi-disciplinary teams are well managed and well led, and several aspects of their work represents best practice. A DfES publication on Excellence in Schools: *'Promoting children's mental health within early years and school settings'*, features Middlesbrough as a case-study.

95. The closeness of partnerships between education and other corporate directorates within the council to support social inclusion is a strength. Social services, corporate services and the directorate of regeneration, housing and culture are all engaged with education in a number of linked initiatives, for example in addressing the problems of drug use.

Priority H: responding to schools causing concern

96. The three strands of activity in this priority are: identifying schools likely to be subject to a formal warning; improving schools with serious weaknesses; and intervening in schools subject to special measures. These activities are appropriate, and have been well integrated into a coherent set of development activities. Good progress has been made in each area. Nevertheless, the LEA has more to do to communicate recent developments effectively to all schools.

97. The last inspection judged that the LEA gave good support to schools requiring special measures, but that its support for those with serious weaknesses, whilst usually sufficient in quantity, was not well enough focused to meet needs. As section one indicates, the LEA has since had a good track record in helping schools with serious weaknesses and those in special measures to improve. Staffing problems have gradually been resolved in those schools, advisers have kept a close watch on the effectiveness of teaching, and advisory teachers have helped schools develop useful curriculum initiatives.

98. The LEA's intervention in schools causing it concern also shows, generally, effective and concentrated support. The LEA acknowledges weaknesses in some aspects of its support for one secondary school subject to a closure proposal. However, recent LEA moves to improve its senior management and to inject multi-disciplinary support have helped the new acting headteacher to bring about some degree of stabilisation.

99. The LEA's guidelines, procedures and criteria for schools causing concern are detailed, and the integrated plan for education further clarifies and focuses support in order to meet needs more precisely. The new standards service has already taken steps to improve the deployment of advisers to schools causing concern, in line with integrated plan for education priorities. Recently established procedures to give earlier warnings of concern to schools are sound. Time is now needed for them to become fully operational.

100. In the past, the clarity of the LEA's procedures for helping schools causing concern was too heavily dependent on the ability of individual advisers. This situation has been improved by the establishment of a clear published framework for categorising and distributing support to schools. However, the LEA's classification of schools into seven levels of performance is only fully operating in those schools causing major concern. The LEA also has more to do to convince some headteachers of the validity of its criteria for categorising schools.

Recommendation

- the criteria for the categorisation of schools should be shared with headteachers and chairs of governing bodies of all schools, and procedures for the classification of schools into seven levels of performance for all schools should be implemented as soon as possible.

SECTION 4: ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LAST INSPECTION

Recommendation A: *In order to improve consultation arrangements, the LEA should ensure that consultation with schools takes place at the formative stages of debate, and that adequate time is allowed for them to express their views; ensure that staff and governors are provided with appropriate information about the issues to enable them to make properly-informed contributions to the debate; and ensure that a full range of options are shared with schools during the formative stages of debate.*

101. At the time of the last inspection concerns were expressed that consultation often began late and provided too little information about the full range of available options. The inspection judged that early evidence of developments were encouraging, with some good examples of the authority drawing on schools' expertise at an appropriately early stage in its formation of policy process. New consultative machinery was likely to promote good partnership between LEA and schools. (Specific criticisms relating to consultation on the budget and on delegation are dealt with under Recommendation B).

102. In response to the recommendation, the LEA set out to review existing consultative structures to identify gaps, strengths and weaknesses; to establish focus groups of headteachers governors, teachers, unions and parents to work with officers on actions to address weaknesses identified; and to publish new consultative arrangements to implement the recommendations of these groups. These proposed actions have been successfully achieved.

103. Following a review by the LEA and schools, some of the consultative groups in place at the time of the previous inspection have been disbanded and replaced, at headteachers' request, by half-termly director's meetings with chairs of primary and special school clusters and Excellence in Cities Board. The previous pattern of half termly briefings has been replaced by termly one-day conference with headteachers, focusing on two or three key topics with short information papers. In addition, the head of strategic finance attends headteacher meetings to share emerging council issues. Regular briefings for governors have been supplemented by small group 'listening meetings' with the commissioner for education and the corporate director of education. Headteachers interviewed during this inspection reported a significant improvement in communications and consultation as result of these developments. Regular meetings with the staff liaison group, a consultative forum of teaching and non-teaching unions, have continued.

104. The integrated plan for education was developed in consultation with a representative group of ten headteachers and, at key points, with all headteachers. Its development was accompanied by a programme of leaflets and conferences for headteachers on the LEA's ten point action plan for improved partnership with schools. The concordat includes a joint commitment to agreeing and implementing a framework for engagement that builds on existing consultation arrangements. The LEA intends to use the council's existing 'framework for engagement' as the basis for developing consultation with stakeholders in education. However, not all those

involved in the LEA's consultation procedures were familiar with this document, or the LEA's intention to develop a framework for consultation.

105. The LEA has gone further than its original plan to secure appropriate structures, and to improve the range, timing and style of consultation. Schools surveyed rated the LEA's consultation on the school improvement strategy more highly than at the last inspection. Whilst the views of groups interviewed varied as to the effectiveness of specific areas of consultation, almost all rated it as, at least, sound and acknowledged that it was improving. Nevertheless, despite these recent improvements, the LEA and the council have more to do to ensure that their vision for education and the partnership for change is effectively communicated to all stakeholders.

Recommendation

- work on agreeing and implementing a framework for consultation should be expedited and should ensure it sets out clearly what forms, levels and purposes of consultation various stakeholders can expect in what circumstances.

Recommendation B: *In order to improve the arrangements for reviewing the local management of schools formula, the LEA should consult with schools to ensure that the delegation of funds reflects, as far as possible, current educational aims and objectives, activities and costs.*

106. At the time of the last inspection concerns were registered about a number of funding issues, including the level of funding in schools, limited consultation and involvement by schools in budget issues, absence of benchmarking data to assist schools and a significant number of schools with budget deficits.

107. The LEA has adopted a pragmatic approach to implementing the recommendation. Sufficient progress has been made in addressing the specific recommendations regarding consultation and school deficits but, until very recently, insufficient work has been done on improving the LEA's funding formula.

108. This has been in part impeded by the need to prioritise limited capacity in the lead up to the transfer of activities to the private sector strategic partner. No fundamental work has been undertaken on reviewing the formula for the distribution of funds to schools. Partly as a consequence, there is a low level of awareness about the comparative deployment of the education budget as a whole, for example, in special needs.

109. District audit has emphasised the need to review budget deployment. The LEA has accelerated action and involved a consultant to lead the overdue review work on the formula, which is cluttered with too much detail and lacks transparency. School survey responses reflect an acknowledgement of a gradually improving financial picture, but some continuing concern over the capacity of hard pressed officers at the centre to be able to respond to schools' needs.

110. Consultation arrangements on the budget are now generally sound and have been assisted by a period of growth and commitment to increased expenditure on education. The management consultative group, comprising representative heads, is well informed and involved on a range of resource and service issues, and were instrumental in focusing additional resources into Key Stage 2. Financial information to schools is satisfactory and generally timely. School deficits are almost eliminated and the council is clear in the action it takes when deficits arise. Budget monitoring is satisfactory overall, although the district auditor has identified the need to be more proactive in tracking budgets and ensuring better engagement of advisers in discussions with schools about medium term financial planning and the matching of funding streams to schools' development planning.

111. Financial systems operated by schools and the council have experienced problems and have attracted adverse comment from schools. Schools also express some justifiable concerns about the operation of payroll and appointments arrangements. These problems promise to be remedied through the introduction of a new integrated financial and human resource system being developed by the strategic partner. This realignment of responsibilities and a more stable staffing arrangement offers the council the opportunity to continue to improve its response to the pertinent issues that remain from the recommendation in the previous report.

Recommendation

- a clear agenda should be established, with timescales, defining what needs to be done and by whom in relation to the review of the funding formula, and clearly communicated to schools; and
- the planned improvements on financial systems and their operation should be accelerated.

Recommendation C: *In order to ensure delegation arrangements work properly, the LEA should work to establish clear specifications, purchasing arrangements and quality assurance mechanisms.*

112. At the time of the last inspection, progress on increasing delegation to schools had been limited, schools' experiences of purchasing services had also been limited, timing of service information was weak and the quality of descriptive material was poor.

113. Progress has been unsatisfactory. It has been significantly affected, however, by the complicated preparation work for the transfer of traded service functions to the strategic partner. New arrangements now being put in place with that partner have the potential for the recommendation to be adequately addressed in the near future.

114. The transfer agreement was not completed until May 2001 after a long period of complex negotiations, already part way into the new financial year. Schools had limited engagement in making informed and deliberate decisions over traded service provision during this period of uncertainty. The vast majority simply rolled forward previous service agreements on the basis of limited information. Although service

level agreement specifications were in place last year and issued in a timely fashion, the absence of reference to service standards, outcomes and arbitration arrangements were significant omissions.

115. The management consultative group has acted as a reference point for complaints, but insufficient progress had been made in involving schools in the review and performance of individual traded services. Delegation of budgets is now in line with norms although, to date, there has been too little differentiation in the choice of levels of service offered and too little variation between delegated amounts and charges to schools for services provided. Nevertheless, there are examples of effective work undertaken by the council to assist schools in securing provision from alternative suppliers that is well-suited to their needs.

116. Apart from advisory service support, all major traded services accessed by schools have been transferred to the council's strategic partner. Schools have been informed about, but not involved in, the process of transfer. New arrangements are untested and arbitration procedures are not explicit. Representative headteachers have been appropriately involved in reviewing information and communication technology issues, which now are the responsibility of the partner, and arrangements are in train to familiarise schools with the changes in delivery and responsibilities.

117. However, service descriptions are largely unaltered and although the partner has a comprehensive agreement with the council on performance standards, this is not apparent in the information currently held by schools. A proposal exists to establish a users group to represent schools collective views on all service issues to the partner, but little progress has been made to date.

Recommendations

- the respective roles of the LEA and the private sector strategic partner in supporting and challenging schools to become more discerning and autonomous purchasers of services should be clarified;
- user groups should be established as soon as possible and arbitration arrangements clarified; and
- schools' ability to assess service performance should be improved through the provision of clear service standards and outcome descriptors, and greater use of comparative benchmarking information.

Recommendation D: *In order to deploy advisers more effectively and efficiently in secondary schools and provide better advisory support and challenge, the LEA should review advisers' roles and responsibilities; and ensure that the advisory service is able to secure the availability of high quality advice and consultancy from other services when needed, and direct schools to appropriate external agencies for additional support.*

118. The first inspection judged that the provision of advisory support, and challenge, to secondary schools needed further development; the range of in-service training did not adequately meet teachers' needs; advisers were responsive to

schools' needs but the purposes of their visits to schools, and the judgements they formed therein, were not always clear to headteachers; the advisory service was over-stretched and its aims were beyond its means to achieve them; and the quality and range of the LEA's contribution to improving school self-review varied considerably from school to school.

119. The LEA has taken well-considered strategic steps to carry out this recommendation and overall progress in implementing the first part, reviewing advisers' roles and responsibilities, has been good. The integrated plan for education (IPE) forms a strong platform for further development of support to raise standards. The plan is based on clear principles which are well linked to relevant government policies, especially the development of school autonomy, self-review and sustained school improvement. It forms a very good basis for the changing focus of advisory work in the new standards service.

120. This service has developed rapidly and has comprehensive and well-conceived strategies for further development. Advisers have clear job descriptions covering the need to challenge and support schools, disseminate good practice, give advice on sources of external help and report findings to headteachers and governors. Performance management is well linked to the integrated plan for education.

121. The school survey and discussions with headteachers show that schools are increasingly satisfied with the LEA's provision of advisory support and there is a realistic acceptance of how central provision is necessarily constrained by delegation to schools. Headteachers are making effective use of their increasing capacity to buy back advisory service time. Although the service remains small, salary levels have been raised to attract and retain staff of sufficient calibre and recent appointments have strengthened expertise in secondary education and management. The purposes of school visits have been clarified and notes of recent visits indicate that they are conducted in a business-like manner.

122. Advisers are active in helping schools to find external support which the LEA's small staff cannot provide. The new concordat also engages schools directly in helping to provide the range of experience and expertise needed to support improvement. A regional register of expertise is kept, but this needs further development before it can provide access to consistent, quality assured, expertise and support brokered through the LEA.

123. Whilst progress has been impressive, much remains at the level of planning. The LEA now needs time for its good initiatives to take root, and for its staff, and headteachers and governors to become effective partners in raising standards. Whilst most of the building blocks for this to succeed are in place, more needs to be done to improve brokerage of high quality specialist external support to schools. Also, advisers have not yet been given sufficient training in school finances, as recommended by a recent district audit report.

Recommendations

- the standards service should improve its brokerage of high quality specialist external guidance to schools; and
- advisers should be trained in matters of educational finance to improve their effectiveness in evaluating and supporting schools and ensuring that schools' financial planning is effectively matched to development planning.

Recommendation E: *In order to provide better support for the use of performance data and target-setting in secondary and special schools, the LEA should review and improve the guidance given to the secondary and special schools on the use of data so that it helps them to set appropriate targets.*

124. The first inspection found that useful performance data was provided by the LEA for all its schools. However, in the case of secondary and special schools there were weaknesses in the quality and quantity of support provided to enable them to use the data successfully in their target-setting.

125. A slow start was made in implementing new measures. This is reflected in the results of the schools' survey in February this year, when the perception of both primary and secondary schools was that support for data use had worsened. Since that time, however, good progress has been made, and headteachers interviewed were positive about the improvements. The indications are that it will be sustained.

126. Advice has been sought from an LEA where this area of work is a strength. A statistician, appointed in August 2000, has thoroughly reviewed the kinds of data provided, in regular consultation with the schools. A body of new data has been prepared which includes a useful regression analysis, and will enable schools to evaluate the comparative progress made by their pupils.

127. Training already provided for all schools has been tightly planned, was immediately relevant and very well received. Training for advisers is on-going and governor training is scheduled for the autumn term. Adviser 'clinics' for schools are planned, incorporating training sessions in data-reading and analysis, and will be key to providing on-going support to schools. The new LEA data pack will go out to schools in September 2001, accompanied by PANDA data. Sharper and more appropriate target-setting should stem from these initiatives.

128. After a slow start there are now also secure foundations for more effective use of performance data for pupils with special educational needs. Though this is still in the early stages, the pace of development is steady and purposeful. The LEA is involved in regional development groups for special educational needs target-setting and is reaching the end of a successful trial of performance indicators for value added target setting (PIVATS) in special schools and a range of other schools that volunteered to take part. There are plans to introduce PIVATS in all schools from September 2001 and existing LEA data sets will be adapted to include this. This will enable the LEA to further tailor target-setting to focus on the full range of attainment

and examine the value added by schools for pupils who are achieving at significantly below age-related expectations. It will also enable the LEA to compare the progress of pupils with similar educational and special needs in different settings, and set more effective cohort targets.

Recommendations

- advisers' clinics should be used to monitor:
 - how effectively schools are using the LEA's data on pupil performance to achieve finer target-setting and effective monitoring of attainment and progress of specific groups of pupils; and
 - the planned implementation of PIVATS.

Recommendation F: *In order to ensure that schools are fully aware of the LEA's judgements about the quality of their provision and rates of improvement, the LEA should refine its systems for monitoring and evaluating schools' performance, the quality of provision, and the progress being made. It should also create formal reporting systems in order that schools and governing bodies (as well as the LEA) have access to the same information and are clear about the judgements made.*

129. The first inspection judged that the LEA's advisory work with schools was beneficial but over-ambitious. It needed to accept schools' prime responsibility for raising standards and help them do so. Part of this required the LEA to monitor and evaluate schools, which it was not doing effectively. Schools were being given confused advice on the use of performance data in target-setting. There was a lack of data on performance. Training for school self-review, whilst being potentially useful, was not always being well used in schools.

130. The LEA has taken good strategic steps to carry out this recommendation. Progress on the proposals for school evaluation suffered some slippage initially, but the LEA has recently speeded up its implementation. The respective roles of the LEA, schools and external agencies in evaluating and reporting on schools, and in supporting schools themselves to improve standards, are clearly, and appropriately, spelled out in the integrated plan for education and concordat. The LEA, sensibly, is keen to integrate the monitoring procedures required for external sources, such as EiC, with its own to avoid uneconomic operation of rival systems.

131. The school survey, together with discussions with headteachers and advisers, indicated that schools are satisfied that the LEA's procedures for evaluation are sound and reliable.

132. Attached advisers are now effectively deployed in analysing a defined range of test and examination results in the schools with whom they work. The LEA provides them with good statistical back-up and training to conduct this task. They work with headteachers and chairs of governing bodies to support school review, the progress of priorities in the school development plan, and on target-setting. Advisers now prepare a clear and comprehensive annual school profile based on this

information and, in conjunction with the headteacher, will prepare a report on school performance for governing bodies. Early prototypes of these reports present information in a way which is accessible to lay persons, and encourage governors to consider key issues. Attached advisers routinely attend governors' meetings of schools causing concern to present and interpret the report. Governing bodies in other schools can purchase this service.

133. Despite early slippage, sound progress has been made on key aspects. The essential requirements for this recommendation to be fully addressed are in place and schools have been adequately consulted. However, there has not been sufficient time yet for some key aspects to be properly bedded down.

Recommendation G: *In order to improve the deployment of education social workers (ESWs) and better support primary schools in improving their attendance, the LEA should establish criteria for the deployment of the education social work service, based on schools' needs and use this to deploy staff more effectively and identify and share with schools good practice in improving attendance.*

134. At the time of the last inspection the support provided by the education social work service (ESWS) was not always appropriate in range and level. Schools at that time were unclear about the criteria for the deployment of the service. The report endorsed the LEA's view that further work was needed to improve attendance by developing a strategy for earlier intervention and better targeted initiatives for primary schools.

135. Middlesbrough schools are combating a long tradition of low aspirations in many families; for a number of children, there is no strong model at home which places importance upon school attendance and punctuality. The authority's plan of action to tackle these issues has been steadily and consistently implemented and good progress has been made.

136. The ESWs, and newly created attendance support officers (ASOs), are working in a more intensely focused way with particular children exhibiting early signs of underachievement and attendance problems, particularly in primary schools; seeking to re-motivate them to come to school. Support follows pupils when they transfer from primary to secondary school to help ensure continuity in monitoring. The first-day-contact strategy is beginning to bear fruit, and is effectively combined with truancy trawls, the truancy hotline and the increasingly robust use of statutory powers. The ASOs work closely within the LEA's multi-disciplinary teams and are part of the coherent and well-integrated support for inclusion that the LEA is now providing.

137. These steps are still relatively new and have yet to make any significant impact on overall attendance levels which, whilst in line with similar LEAs, continue to be low in comparison with national averages. The LEA's strategy is, necessarily, long term. Nevertheless, early indicators are promising and show improvements of

up to 12 per cent in the attendance of specifically targeted pupils between November 2000 and April 2001; overall attendance at one of the targeted primary schools rose by 4.19 per cent in that six month period. The new multi-disciplinary teams are working imaginatively, and in close collaboration with schools, to maintain the ground that has been gained and to improve on it.

Recommendation H: *In order to ensure that schools carry out self-review more rigorously, the LEA should audit the training needs of senior managers in relation to self-review and enable them to receive any necessary training; devise systems for ensuring that schools and the LEA share the findings of self-review with the aim of refining the process so that results are more useful to the schools and the LEA; and provide a wider range of benchmarking information for schools which, in particular, includes spending data, but also other management information, such as that on staffing matters.*

138. At the time of the last inspection, despite this having been identified as a priority in the EDP, the LEA's support for school self-review was judged to be patchy. It was recommended that the LEA set up more formal procedures for this aspect of its work. Progress on auditing needs and defining a system of self-review has been satisfactory overall and good in recent months. The provision of wider benchmarking information has not properly been tackled as yet and progress is, therefore, unsatisfactory.

139. A working party consisting of two primary headteachers and one secondary deputy headteacher was set up to work on school self-review. The LEA's slow start on self-review meant that, whilst some schools had devised their own systems for self-review, practice was inconsistent. An audit of current practice revealed that self-evaluation was in place in 24 per cent of schools, developing in 67 per cent and needing attention in nine per cent. A policy document was available in only 12 per cent of schools. Based on these findings, and information gathered on self-review in other authorities, the working group, in consultation with headteachers, devised an effective framework for school self review in the spring term 2001.

140. The LEA's professional development programme has also provided access to schools on training courses in school self review. The head of the standards service has incorporated the framework for self-review into planned improvements in the use of advisers' visits, for example, by making the framework the focus of the half-day visit prior to target-setting in autumn term.

141. The improvements in LEA data reported in Recommendation E and in advisory support reported in F, have already impacted on developments. School profiles have been distributed to advisers and schools. Useful work has been done on value-added data, and more is in train.

142. The LEA recognises that school self-review is an important aspect of developing inclusion and accountability with regard to special educational needs, and has plans to extend the use of the index for inclusion, including an element on

funding, to all schools over the medium to long term. However, it will need to ensure that self-review developments keep pace both with the forthcoming funding review and the implementation of the inclusion policy, and are closely linked with them in practice.

143. The benchmarking information available to schools other than on pupil performance continues to be sparse. The LEA is now planning to fill this gap. More comparative benchmarking work is planned with statistical neighbours. From the autumn, schools will routinely be provided with an appropriate range of information on budgetary and management issues, such as analysis of school budget plans by spend on major categories, pupil teacher ratios, staff absences and exclusions.

144. In general, schools welcome the support they are now receiving for their own self-review. A high proportion have found the training on school self-review particularly valuable. The framework and training procedures now in place are giving schools increased confidence in the use of performance and other data. The increased co-operation between Middlesbrough schools engendered by the Excellence in Cities initiative has helped in dispelling concerns schools may have previously had about the sharing of their data for benchmarking purposes.

Recommendation

- training on the interpretation and use of the intended range of benchmarking data should be provided in order to improve schools' capacity for self-review; and
- the pace of introducing the index for inclusion should be reviewed to ensure that it keeps pace with the funding review for special educational needs and implementation of the inclusion policy.

SECTION 5: SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

145. The previous inspection did not make any specific recommendations regarding overall special educational needs policy and provision. Nevertheless, it did report a number of concerns over expenditure, and a lack of clarity amongst schools over development of SEN policy and the LEA's strategy for increasing the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream education.

146. The LEA's overall strategic direction regarding special educational needs is sound, though the necessary funding for its strategy has yet to be secured and there still remains some lack of clarity over the implementation of its 'inclusion' policy. Its policy for special educational needs is clear and detailed. The LEA has further developed its inclusion policy and this has the potential to take forward the LEA's provision on special educational needs and inclusion very effectively. It is comprehensive, far-reaching, and ambitious, with a clear commitment to social justice and individual entitlement. It reflects the government's Programme of Action very well. The LEA has consulted widely and at length on the development of this key document and it is currently undergoing final consultation with a wide range of partners.

147. The LEA now has a sound framework for providing a comprehensive range of special educational needs settings. The recent re-organisation of special schools has been completed successfully. There are now a number of positive developments which are further extending and enriching this provision, including the development of successful outreach activities at a number of special schools; shared placements so that pupils attend both mainstream and special schools; carefully structured programmes of transition from special to mainstream schools; and on-site specialist provision developed directly by mainstream schools. These developments are promising and have been effective so far.

148. Developments are, nevertheless, at a very early stage. Short-term planning is clear and rigorous, though in practice a small number of preliminary action points are running behind schedule. However, key mechanisms for implementation of the policy, in particular, a review of special educational needs funding, and the establishment of an inclusion commission to develop and manage an implementation plan, are not planned to begin until the autumn term. At the time of the inspection, therefore, no firm medium to long term planning was in place. The LEA has recycled funding and savings generated by the reorganisation of special schools effectively to support its initiatives. However, as yet there are no clear plans for the financial support necessary to underpin and develop similar initiatives over the longer term.

Statutory duties

149. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties very well and there have been some significant improvements since the previous inspection. The quality of statements of special educational need is satisfactory. In the last half year the LEA completed 100 per cent of statutory assessments within the education department in the required 18 week timescale. There are appropriate criteria for initiating statutory assessments,

and the multi-disciplinary moderating panel manages the decision making process effectively. Officers attend a very high proportion of statutory assessment reviews. There was only one special educational needs Tribunal hearing in the year preceding the inspection, which was resolved in the LEA's favour.

School improvement and value for money

150. The multi-disciplinary teams provide effective, combined, specialist input for a range of needs, covering difficulties in learning, behaviour and attendance. They are closely linked with the educational psychology service. The integrated service approach is based around clusters of schools, which enables consistent support to pupils throughout their school lives. There is a clear protocol, agreed with schools at the time multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) were established, which enables flexible deployment of service staff to follow need. There is considerable evidence of effective joint working, both within the teams and in partnership with schools.

151. There are satisfactory systems for quality assurance within the multi-disciplinary teams, involving regular supervision and analysis of casework, and emergent systems for demonstrating the value added by services. The teams are rated highly by schools, and the service input is having a measurable and positive impact. Staff are highly trained in specialist areas, and highly committed to their work. The successful development and deployment of these teams is a major move forward from the previous inspection.

152. Plans for the continued development of target-setting data and school self-review with regard to special educational needs are intended to make a substantial contribution to improvements in this area, and the LEA has appropriately established a new post with responsibility for monitoring special educational needs provision and pupil progress. Early indications are good, but it is too soon to see definite outcomes.

153. Actual allocation of support to individual schools is arranged by regular negotiation, based on some relevant key indicators such as free school meals, the number of pupils on the special educational needs register, and some calculation of pupils' prior attainment, supplemented by officers' contextual knowledge of the schools. This approach has many strengths, and is helping to develop headteachers' collective responsibility for the management of resources, a shared understanding of the individual needs of pupils and schools, and the ability to respond quickly and effectively to volatile or unexpected situations. Each school's agreed allocation is formally recorded after every planning meeting. However, the allocation formula itself is not clearly set out, preventing full accountability based on a definition of the relative responsibilities of the school and LEA for supporting individual pupils needs. This lack of focus potentially undermines the LEA's excellent draft policy on inclusion.

154. The LEA only defines minimal expectations of schools' use of special educational needs funding. It monitors a proportion of individual pupil cases through a moderation panel for statutory assessment requests, but does not formally monitor

delegated funding to ensure its effective use. It is not able, therefore, to monitor and evaluate pupil progress consistently or compare rates of progress with expenditure on SEN. Schools are not in a position to define clearly their financial responsibilities towards pupils with special educational needs who are not statemented, and to be properly accountable for the use of this funding, or to adequately evaluate the cost effectiveness and value for money of support. The delay in responding to the recommendation on revising the school budget formula perpetuates imperfections in targeting special educational needs resources to priorities. Overall, therefore, the LEA is unable to demonstrate that it offers good value for money.

Recommendations

- the inclusion policy should be supported with a clear and explicit strategy for implementation, which includes measurable targets and costings for the medium to long-term that are based on robust comparative information on special educational needs spending, and by a commitment to funding agreed by elected members; and
- clear and equitable systems for allocating and monitoring the effectiveness of school-based special educational needs funding should be established, to enable more effective targeting of individual need, linked to evaluation of pupil progress.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes a number of recommendations. However, the following are key to the LEA's further improvement:

1. In order to improve strategic developments in:

a) planning and implementation:

- the council should extend its work with stakeholders to:
 - articulate more clearly the rationale for current strategies to improve educational provision and funding;
 - model more clearly the outcomes of its vision and the resulting pattern of schooling across the borough, and the impact this will have on services and on continuing initiatives;
- more effective and rigorous use should be made of comparative information on levels of council spending, from a wider range of sources, in order to better inform policy deliberations and decisions;
- the council should ensure it has sufficient staff capacity to meet all its objectives;
- liaison between directorates in supporting early years should be strengthened to provide more coherent support for schools, particularly in guidance and support for the foundation curriculum;
- work on agreeing and implementing a framework for consultation should be expedited and should ensure it sets out clearly what forms, levels and purposes of consultation various stakeholders can expect in what circumstances;
- the emphasis of the information and communication technology teams should move from training to planned evaluation and monitoring, to ensure pupils' minimum information and communication technology entitlement is delivered, existing standards are defined more precisely, and provision and support are better targeted; and
- the council should ensure that support for ICT, including administrative and technical support, is sufficient to meet the needs of schools and education services.

b) funding, delegation and service delivery:

- a clear agenda should be established, with timescales, defining what needs to be done and by whom in relation to the review of the funding formula, and clearly communicated to schools;
- the planned improvements in financial systems and their operation should be accelerated;
- the respective roles of the LEA and the private sector partner in supporting and challenging schools to become more discerning and autonomous purchasers of services should be clarified;
- user groups should be established as soon as possible and arbitration arrangements clarified; and
- schools' ability to assess service performance should be improved through the provision of clear service standards and outcome descriptors, and greater use of comparative benchmarking information.

c) support for special educational needs:

- the inclusion policy should be supported with a clear and explicit strategy for implementation, which includes measurable targets and costings for the medium to long term that are based on robust comparative information on special educational needs spending, and by a commitment to funding agreed by elected members;
- clear and equitable systems for allocating and monitoring the effectiveness of school-based special educational needs funding should be established, to enable more effective targeting of individual need, linked to evaluation of pupil progress; and
- the pace of introducing the index for inclusion should be reviewed to ensure that it keeps pace with the funding review for special educational needs and implementation of the inclusion policy.

We also make the following recommendations:

2. In order to improve support for school improvement and raising standards:

- the criteria for the categorisation of schools should be shared with headteachers and chairs of governing bodies of all schools, and procedures for the classification of schools into seven levels of performance for all schools should be implemented as soon as possible;
- the pace of developments in personal skills, values and citizenship in schools should be improved; and
- the implementation of the teaching and learning policy should be carefully monitored, in conjunction with schools, in order to support teachers to embed this into their practice.

3. In order to improve support for monitoring, challenge and support for schools, and the work of the new Standards Service:

- the standards service should improve its brokerage of high quality specialist external guidance to schools;
- advisers should be trained in matters of educational finance to improve their effectiveness in evaluating and supporting schools and ensuring that schools' financial planning is effectively matched to development planning;
- training on the interpretation and use of the intended range of benchmarking data should be provided in order to improve schools' capacity for self review;
- advisers' clinics should be used to monitor:
 - how effectively schools are using the LEA's data on pupil performance to achieve finer target-setting and effective monitoring of attainment and progress of specific groups of pupils; and
 - the planned implementation of performance indicators for value added target-setting (PIVATS).

4. In order to improve the implementation of Excellence in Cities :

- the EiC partnership, including the LEA, should agree a clearer contract for implementation of initiatives, a more rigorous methodology for monitoring and evaluation, and the collective actions the partnership will take to ensure that

commitments to resourcing and implementation identified in the EiC plan are met;
and

- the EiC partnership should ensure that LEA guidance on support for gifted and talented pupils is integrated effectively into EiC provision and used to improve the current criteria for identification.

© Crown copyright 2001

**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 020 7421 6800

This report may be produced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are produced verbatim and without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the Local Education Authority concerned:

**Middlesbrough LEA
PO Box 69
1st Floor
Vancouver House
Gurney Street
Middlesbrough
TS1 1EL**

A copy may also be obtained from the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk