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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF  
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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## **APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 40 schools. The response rate was 83 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 12 primary, four secondary and two special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support, which is provided by the LEA, contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

## COMMENTARY

4. Hartlepool has made significant strides since its inception in 1996 and provides good support to its schools. It serves a compact town with a long history, whose inhabitants have a strong sense of identity and pride in their local area. It is a mixed but broadly disadvantaged area with more intense poverty in some areas. With the exception of English, standards of attainment in National Curriculum assessments are broadly in line with national averages at Key Stage 1 and 2. At Key Stage 3 and for the percentage of pupils attaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C and A\*-G, standards are lower than national averages but in line with other similar LEAs. Standards are rising overall and at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE between 1996 and 1999 have risen consistently at a faster rate than that nationally.
5. This is one of the smallest local authorities nationally, serving just 40 schools and a pupil referral unit. In Hartlepool, small size is a source of strength. The LEA knows the schools very well. Lines of communication are short and with good consultation there is a high degree of knowledge and mutual understanding of policies and initiatives. The LEA has, moreover, developed a remarkable range of strategies and initiatives. A good partnership with schools and between schools has evolved. The LEA has developed a greater understanding of the ways in which schools can play a role in distilling policy and is content to enable them to do so. Morale is high and many schools are rightly proud of the improvements which have been made.
6. Reasons for Hartlepool's strengths are not hard to find. The LEA has enjoyed good political leadership. The Council gives a high priority to education and a concern to improve the standards and quality of education is embedded in the Council's values, priorities and work. The size of the education department's senior management team, in relation to the number of schools and the strategic capacity that this provides, will be the envy of many larger authorities. This strategic capacity contributes to, but is not the only, success. The staff of the education department are competent and capable, especially, but not only, at the senior level. As a result, there is both the management capacity and capability to sustain and develop initiatives.
7. The national policies and initiatives are actively used to promote improvement. Implementation is thoughtful and well related to existing work and local circumstances. The LEA's greatest strengths lie, however, where they matter most, in the strategy and support to school improvement. It has successfully engaged schools in developing and implementing an excellent strategy. It has set high standards, provides schools with a vigorous challenge, and has not hesitated to intervene if satisfactory progress is not made.
8. The LEA is succeeding in building schools' own capability for continuous improvement, crucially including improvement in teaching through promoting and supporting the development of effective school self-

evaluation. However, while meeting the Government's targets for delegation of funding, too high a proportion of funding for school improvement is still centrally retained. Some initial steps have been taken to adjust these. As the school improvement strategy has begun to take effect, the schools' needs for support are becoming more subtle, diverse and specialised. Suitable approaches are beginning to be identified so that this small LEA can meet these needs efficiently. These early developments will need to be enhanced to ensure that schools have the responsibility and flexibility to be able to effectively manage their own improvement. This will depend on extending choice and adjusting levels of delegation.

9. The LEA performs many functions very well, for example:
  - drafting, implementing, monitoring the Education Development Plan;
  - providing monitoring, challenge, intervention and support to schools;
  - targeting resources on priorities;
  - the local authority's approach to Best Value;
  - the local authority's approach to modernising local government;
  - the speed, openness and effectiveness of decision making;
  - the circulation of performance data to schools;
  - literacy and numeracy support;
  - identification and support to schools causing concern;
  - support to governors and school management;
  - the supply of school places and admissions to schools; and
  - support to improve school attendance.
  
10. The LEA has only two weaknesses:
  - strategy and support for ICT in the curriculum and in administration; and
  - the improvement and maintenance of buildings and property.
  
11. The LEA's achievements provide good value for money particularly given that the resources allocated overall are lower than national averages. There are no signs of complacency. Hartlepool already has plans to rectify its weaknesses and has demonstrated that it has the capacity and capability to sustain and consolidate its strengths.

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

### **Context**

12. Hartlepool was formed as a unitary authority in April 1996. It serves a geographically distinct and compact area of fewer than 92,000 people and is one of the smallest LEAs nationally. Hartlepool is largely a broadly disadvantaged urban area. It ranks 37 out of 354 districts on the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' index of local deprivation. Forty-five per cent of Hartlepool's people live in the most disadvantaged ten per cent of wards. Unemployment is significantly higher than the national average.
13. Overall, 26 and 27 per cent of primary-and secondary-aged pupils respectively are entitled to free school meals compared with 19.9 and 17.5 per cent nationally. Only 0.7 per cent of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage. Post-16 participation in education remains low compared with national averages. Youth crime is about four times the national rate.
14. The LEA maintains 31 primary and nursery schools, six secondary schools, three special schools and a pupil referral unit. The structure of schools is uniform and, with very few exceptions, primary schools with nursery units feed into medium-sized or large 11-16 mixed comprehensive schools. Within this provision the Roman Catholic voluntary aided sector is of a significant size, and comprises six primary schools and an 11-18 comprehensive school with a large sixth form. All other students who remain in education post-16 attend either the sixth form college or one of the two colleges of further education. There are four Church of England primary schools.
15. All children aged three and four can attend LEA nursery provision on a part-time basis if their parents wish. There are 2.7 per cent of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), which is marginally lower than the national percentage. The number of pupils with statements who attend mainstream schools is rising but is still below the national average.

### **Performance of schools**

16. Attainment in mathematics and science at Key Stage 1 and 2 is in line with national averages. In English, attainment is lower than national averages but better in reading than in writing. Attainment in the core subjects is lower than national averages at Key Stage 3. At GCSE, attainment is broadly in line with national averages for the percentage of pupils gaining one or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-G and pupils' average points scores. However, pupils' attainment is lower than national averages for five or more passes at GCSE grades A\*-C and grades A\*-G. Attainment at all Key Stages is broadly in line with that in similar authorities.

17. Attainment is consistently improving overall with the exception, in 1999 only, of Key Stage 1. The rate of improvement is consistently faster than that nationally at Key Stage 2 and GCSE. As a result, many targets have been met in advance of projected dates. Results in English at Key Stage 2 in 1999 increased by six per cent to 66.8 per cent and in mathematics by almost five per cent to 69.3 per cent. The LEA has already met the year 2000 targets in mathematics. Results in GCSE examinations rose by four per cent to 39.2 per cent of pupils attaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C, thus already achieving the year 2001 target and less than three per cent below the year 2002 target. 95.1 per cent of pupils attain one or more passes at GCSE at grade A\*-G which meets the year 2000 target. Similarly the average point score of 35.9 has already exceeded the year 2002 target.
18. In the most recent inspections, 73 per cent of primary schools compared with 74 per cent nationally are judged good or very good, with the same three per cent requiring significant improvement as schools nationally. Although the very small numbers distort the percentages, 60 per cent of secondary schools are judged good or very good compared with 70 per cent nationally. No secondary school was found to need significant improvement.
19. Three primary schools have achieved Beacon status. A very low number of schools have required special measures or has serious weaknesses. One special school, which required special measures, improved sufficiently within a very short time, for these to be no longer needed. Only one primary school has serious weaknesses. An HMI monitoring visit found that satisfactory progress had been made on all key issues.

## **Funding**

20. Good progress has been made in achieving the Council's priority for allocating funding for the education service. On becoming a unitary authority, Hartlepool inherited a poor financial position and required cuts of £4.5m to balance the budget in the first year. Education was the only service which was largely protected from these cuts. The Council made a firm commitment to increase the education budget to the level of its standard spending assessment, and this they have achieved for 2000/01 (see Table 1). However, due to higher than average spending on the youth service, school spending is not at the level of the standard spending assessment. Elected members have recently reaffirmed their intention to rectify this as resources become available.



**Table 1: Annual comparisons of the standard spending assessment 1997-2001**

Year	SSA	Budget	Percentage difference
1997-98	£36.65m	£35.64m	-3%
1998-99	£40.52m	£39.57m	-2%
1999-2000	£42.57m	£42.04m	-1%
2000-01	£45.00m	£45.00m	0%

21. The LEA has sought to maximise delegation where possible and to exercise tight control over centrally-held budgets and inter-departmental re-charges. This has been done in close consultation with schools. As a result Hartlepool has delegated marginally more than the average in the last two years. However, despite this, Hartlepool's schools are less well funded than average (see Table 2) because the standard spending assessment per pupil is in the lower quartile for unitary and below statistical neighbour LEAs.

**Table 2: Delegated funding per pupil for 2000/01 (provisional estimates)**

Average per pupil	Hartlepool	Average for unitary authorities	Average for statistical neighbours
£ per primary school pupil	1720	1817	1782
£ per secondary school pupil	2477	2515	2452
£ per special school pupil	8942	8591	8796

22. Hartlepool has met the funding targets set by the Government. Three elements of centrally-retained funding: statutory duties; planned early retirement costs; and expenditure for the Education Development Plan (EDP) are much higher than the average. However, in overall terms Hartlepool retains centrally less funding per pupil compared with the average in unitary and similar LEAs. Provisional figures for 2000/2001 illustrate that Hartlepool retains £409 per pupil compared with £427 and £414 per pupil on average in unitary and similar LEAs.
23. The LEA has successfully bid for grants, including the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), City Challenge and the European Social Fund. Bids will continue to be made for all relevant categories of the

standards fund and the Council has built matched funding estimates into its base budget, which is a positive aspect of a developing three-year budget strategy.

24. The formula for the local management of schools is in need of review. Too many elements distribute insignificant amounts of money and the derivation of the additional needs factor is obscure. The link between delegated amounts for support services and service prices is not sustainable in the long term. Officers have recognised this and a review of the formula, involving a working group of headteachers, has been planned for this year.
25. Capital expenditure has, rightly, been increased recently from a very low base (see Table 3). This has been achieved by various judicious measures. In addition to this, a grant of £1.3m was made from New Deal for Schools to replace mobile classrooms at one school with permanent buildings.

**Table 3: Capital expenditure for years 1997 – 2001**

Year	Capital expenditure
1997-98 (actual)	£873,000
1998-99 (actual)	£1,342,000
1999-2000 (budget)	£1,333,000
2000-01(budget)	£3,510,000

### **Council Structure**

26. From May 2000 the Council of 47 members is under the leadership of a Liberal Democratic and Conservative coalition. However, the Labour Party continues to be the largest single party.
27. In May 1999, a transitional political structure was introduced which is working well. A cabinet consists of seven members of the ruling groups with each having a service portfolio. With the advent of new legislation, this will become the heart of executive decision-making within the Council. Until that time, seven executive boards, including one for education and childcare, provide a political balance and are chaired by a cabinet member. These fulfil the main decision-making functions of the Council, which were previously undertaken by committees. Three scrutiny forums include one for education and childcare. This is very effective with thorough and well-developed scrutiny procedures.
28. The local authority has an effective officer structure, which is underpinned by a clear rationale. The Chief Executive's department takes responsibility for corporate strategy and corporate services for legal, finance, personnel, information systems and property. Five other directorates include community services, education, environment and development, neighbourhood services and social services.

29. The director leads the education department with a senior management team consisting of three assistant directors for policy, planning and children's services, educational achievement, resources and support services.

### **The Education Development Plan**

30. This is an excellent plan, which represents a convincing strategy for school improvement. The selection of each priority is supported by thorough and detailed audits which use a range of varied data. There is little overlap between the priorities and coherence is achieved by the systematic mapping of improvements in standards, teaching and management through each priority area.
31. Priorities are appropriate to the local context. A good and appropriate balance is struck between primary and secondary phase issues but the priorities also cover the national requirements very well. The seven priorities include:
- challenge and support to develop self review;
  - literacy;
  - numeracy;
  - early Years;
  - Key Stage 3;
  - information and communication technology; and
  - curriculum enrichment including study support.
32. Activity plans are generally good and are relevant, clear and focused on improving standards, although there are some weaknesses in planning for information and communication technology (ICT). The sequence of activities, timescale for implementation and monitoring arrangements are all good.
33. Links with other plans are good, and demonstrate an intention to make the EDP the overarching strategy for school improvement to which all other relevant plans are related. Links between the EDP and school development plans have been developed as a mutually responsive relationship.
34. The greatest strength of the plan lies in the considerable involvement of schools in the process of drafting, implementation and evaluation. The schools have a high level of understanding of the priorities and the content of each action plan. Consultation on drafting the plan took place at a very detailed level and included general briefing; identification of priorities; details of activities and consideration of draft plan. Meetings were backed up with an opportunity to make an individual response. Suitable consultation took place with a range of partners. A conference reviewed the implementation of the plan in its first year. The conference

demonstrated how the relationship between the LEA and schools has evolved to one of greater partnership where schools are directly involved in shaping the direction of the strategy.

35. The plan meets all statutory duties for setting targets. Targets in English at Key Stage 2 are ambitious and challenging. In mathematics this is less so and the LEA has already achieved the year 2000 targets. Targets at GCSE are satisfactory. However, while the targets appeared challenging when set, the rate of improvement has exceeded the national rate. As a result the target for five A\*-C grades for 2001 has already been reached.
36. Good arrangements have been made for managing and evaluating the implementation of the plan. Each priority has a steering group, including advisers and school representatives, which contributes effectively to the discussion about implementation. External consultants will be involved in a cycle of evaluation of priorities. Monitoring reports provide a helpful audit of completed activities and slippage.
37. Good progress has been made in developing a suitable strategy for Excellence in Cities. Two secondary headteachers, who were selected by their peers, work closely with an adviser in writing the submission. Opportunities for other secondary heads to comment are extensive. There is a clear understanding about how developments for Excellence in Cities will complement the EDP, and in particular Priority 7: Curriculum Enrichment. The overlap in approaches will be insignificant.

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

38. Resources are allocated clearly and well to priorities. Education is a key priority of the Council. Revenue and grant funding have increased, although budgets for capital development have not improved with sufficient rapidity until this financial year. Improvements in overall funding are a significant factor in cementing the relationship between schools and the LEA.
39. The LEA appointed a senior management team that has the capacity effectively to conduct the required strategic tasks in a new LEA. This has been of benefit to the new authority, especially in its earliest stages, as it has rapidly established a sound foundation of policies and procedures and has provided the much-needed initial impetus to drive the strategy for school improvement.
40. The LEA, while meeting the Government's targets for delegation of funding has allocated, in line with its priorities, more funding for school improvement than is the average for similar authorities. The EDP costs nearly twice that per pupil compared with other unitary authorities and nationally. Too high a proportion of this funding is centrally retained. A higher level of standards fund than is the average nationally, has also been retained centrally.

41. On the basis of the evidence of improvements in standards, quality and management of schools this expenditure has initially provided good value for money. Schools are well supported and there was no evidence that the central retention of funding unnecessarily restricts the choice of support. This can be attributed to the detailed productive discussion which takes place with schools about the implementation of the EDP.
42. Nevertheless this high level of central retention of funding for school improvement operates in tension with the development of autonomous schools which are responsible for their own improvement. A significant amount of EDP funding, however, is directed appropriately, as a short-term strategy, towards enhancing the schools' capacity to manage improvement through school self-review. As the capacity to manage improvement strengthens in schools, central investment at this high level will not be required. If it continues, it may well hamper the ability of schools to manage their improvement and select support which meets the diversity of needs which exist in different schools.
43. The LEA has taken some appropriate initial steps to place more responsibility on schools for defining and contracting their support needs. This year the LEA has devolved 90 days of support from the EDP so that schools can bid for support in line with priorities to meet their needs. This beneficial trend, however, has not been consistently followed. Schools have recognised that they require more support for the development of ICT. They have collaborated by each contributing to the appointment of an ICT coordinator for a three-year period. The LEA is not making a financial contribution from the EDP budget despite the high level of funding for the ICT priority.
44. A strategy of judicious use of a programme of early retirement to improve the quality of management and teaching in schools has been promoted with some success. The current spending on early retirement is not unduly high, but additional planned expenditure is also included in the EDP. If all of this were to be incurred, the LEAs per capita expenditure would be one of the highest nationally. Further expenditure will have considerable, long-term implications and should not be incurred without first making use of all other available options.

### **The LEA's approach to ensuring Best Value**

45. The LEAs approach to Best Value is very good. All departments have organised themselves into Best Value operational units. Each produces its own financial control and budget plans, development plans and local and national performance indicators.
46. The Best Value performance plan has been subject to minor comments by the district auditor, all of which have been accepted by the Council. A large number of pilot reviews were undertaken to sharpen the methodology. The LEA accepts that there were too many pilots and

resources were stretched. Lessons were learned and some significant effects are already apparent. Challenge and scrutiny have stiffened, consultations are better fit for purpose, and service managers use the process to improve delivery. Further work to develop performance indicators and approaches to cross-cutting themes is taking place. Some headteachers are able to discuss Best Value principles with confidence because they were members of the pilot review teams.

47. Well-developed plans to provide much sharper service level agreements for traded services will replace the current schedule of service descriptions. These should encourage a clearer range of choice. In addition, the emerging mechanisms for schools to contribute formally to service planning and evaluation should provide a secure platform for ensuring the delivery of Best Value principles.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to maintain and develop the current excellent approach to managing and evaluating the implementation of the EDP:**

- the allocation, delegation and distribution of resources for advisory support should be increased, in consultation with schools, in the light of progress in building the capability of schools to take greater responsibility for identifying and contracting their support needs; continue to challenge and monitor the effectiveness of schools' management of their own self-improvement.

#### **In order to minimise the potential for burgeoning retirement costs:**

- the LEA's strategy for premature retirement should be reviewed and fully explore all the available options and their detailed implications.

## **SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Implications of other functions**

48. With the exception of ICT, buildings and property maintenance, the LEA consistently discharges its functions in a way which is at least satisfactory and often good. A consistently good standard of support is provided to schools.

### **Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention**

49. The exercise of these key functions is a major strength. The LEA has established a clear understanding with schools of their respective roles and responsibilities, which in practice reflect the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. There is a firm intention to develop greater school autonomy and build the capability of schools to be responsible for their own improvement. The provision for challenge and intervention is very good; monitoring and support, whilst highly effective, have not in the past been sufficiently differentiated to reflect the needs of schools but steps have been taken to improve this.
50. Effective monitoring, particularly through the annual performance review, has established a firm baseline of local provision and standards. Advisory support and the annual performance review are highly valued by schools. However, until comparatively recently, there has been minimal differentiation in the levels of monitoring and support. There is now an acceptance that the minimum allocation of three days per year is not necessary for all schools. Following consultation with headteachers, the LEA has moved towards a limited level of devolution of this support. Schools' advisory entitlement has been reduced to two days per year and schools can bid for additional advisory support according to their needs. As the EDP activities to support school self-review lead to greater school autonomy, the appropriateness of this allocation will be reviewed each year, ultimately leading to greater delegation of funding.
51. Link advisers have an appropriate and planned cycle of engagement with most schools which includes the annual performance review, target setting and a review of progress on the school development plan or post-OFSTED action plan. They fulfil their monitoring role in a very challenging way and schools accept the challenge. The work is well focused and provides clear judgements upon which senior managers and governing bodies can take action.
52. The LEA has a well-defined strategy for intervention. It is set out clearly in the EDP and is well understood by headteachers and governors. Data and monitoring information are used very effectively and are key factors in the LEA's success in identifying difficulties early. Intervention, when it occurs, is prompt, well judged and effective. Progress is carefully monitored against agreed targets. This strategy has been employed to

good effect this year in order to identify under-performing subject departments and cohorts of primary pupils for additional support.

53. For schools causing concern who are in receipt of targeted school improvement funding, the criteria for the allocation of support are clear and there is an agreed programme of additional advisory support. For two schools receiving additional advisory service entitlement, however, it is less clear how this additional resource is to be used. In this respect, there is no clear category of support for these schools.

### **Management of the inspection and advisory service**

54. The inspection and advisory service provides very good leadership for the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Management of the service is of a high quality. Service planning is good. Plans set out clear intentions and ensure effective targeting of resources.
55. The team of five advisers is well qualified and has a good balance of expertise and experience, including school senior management experience. There is an appropriate programme for the induction of new advisers and professional development is closely aligned to priorities in the annual service plan and in the EDP. Performance management is very effective and contributes to the consistency in the work of the team. The service is very effective in enabling schools to improve and provides good value for money.
56. The LEA has recognised that a small advisory team cannot meet all the schools' needs for support and that the small number of schools could lead to insularity. Some action has begun to be taken to develop greater flexibility in staffing, together with a greater choice for schools. Successful short-term secondments have been arranged into the team, lists of expert teachers within the authority and external providers have been drawn up. Conferences have been arranged at which national speakers make keynote presentations. Appropriate plans, which are already being implemented, make good use of schools which have recently been designated as Beacons. The joint arrangements with other Teeside authorities to provide subject specific training have potential but the quality and relevance are variable. Developing this choice, variety and flexibility is at an early stage. It will only be consolidated when the entitlement to advisory visits is reviewed and further funding for school improvement is delegated to the schools.

### **Circulation of performance data and target setting**

57. The provision of performance data is very good but there is variation in the extent to which schools make effective use of the data. The service provides a comprehensive range of very useful data which also includes information on demography and context. The school's performance profile includes some written analysis which enables staff and governors



to focus on issues pertinent to their school. This analysis is not provided for all the data and as a result this sometimes impedes its effective use.

58. The LEA takes appropriate steps to ensure that schools use the data effectively. Emphasis in the early years of the new LEA has been on the production of data for schools. This is now changing appropriately to a more developmental role, in particular in providing support and training in the use of target setting and pupil tracking systems.
59. Link advisers monitor effectively the use of data as part of the annual performance review. LEA training and guidance on target setting have been well received. In all schools, the link adviser and senior staff discuss and agree targets based on a full consideration of the school's own data analysis. Schools recognise that target setting goes beyond pupil predictions to include challenge, related to whole-school improvement strategies. In many of the schools visited targets for 2000 were appropriate and challenging.
60. For the year 2000, the LEA had a shortfall between the aggregated schools' target and the LEA's target at Key Stage 2 English. The LEA appropriately identified those schools whose standards had not improved or where attainment had already exceeded the target. In some schools targets for 2000 had been overtaken by an unpredictably high increase in performance at Key Stage 2 in 1999. The targets had been set without adequately reflecting the accumulation of an improved level of performance which is now being attained. As a result, 13 schools were asked to increase their target, including three schools visited for this inspection. Some of these schools were reluctant to amend their target and one or two have not been fully convinced that the new target can be met. Appropriate steps have been agreed with schools to ensure improvement. There are still some adjustments required in both the schools' and link advisers' interpretation of the data and approach to target setting.

### **Support for literacy**

61. Support for literacy is very good and provides good value for money. From inception, the LEA has taken systematic action to improve standards of literacy in primary schools. A number of high quality projects have made significant contributions and provided a good foundation for the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. The structures and methodologies were introduced to the schools a year in advance.
62. The management of the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy has been very efficient and highly effective. The literacy team is very well informed about standards, quality and practice in the schools and has provided effective support. Approaches have developed in the light of the particular reading and writing needs of Hartlepool pupils. For example, special strategies have been devised to address emerging

problems such as boys' writing in Key Stage 1. In addition, local needs have led to a special focus on speaking and listening. Support is flexible and targeted on the needs of each individual school. Monitoring, evaluation and review of the work of the literacy service and its staff are thorough and used to raise standards and improve effectiveness.

63. The secondary schools have been kept informed of the development of the National Literacy Strategy. Schools have developed working literacy links with the local primary schools, considering the implications of primary developments for the Key Stage 3 curriculum and developing enrichment programmes for primary school pupils. Care has been taken to ensure that support extends to all areas of early years and family literacy. Liaison and joint working with other agencies and groups are well managed and have led to valuable developments.

### **Support for numeracy**

64. Support for numeracy is very good. Planning for raising standards in numeracy and mathematics at all stages is excellent. Vision is clear and straightforwardly stated, aims are well focused and realistic. Appropriate objectives are linked to programmes of carefully matched activities. Teachers are closely involved in planning. Consultation and liaison with other relevant groups and agencies are very good.
65. The support is well-led and very efficiently managed. The team knows the schools very well, which provides a sound basis for the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy. The foundations were laid in the schools a year in advance of its formal introduction. This enabled the schools to become accustomed to the structures and methodology and discuss issues in advance. Use of ICT as a learning tool is developing but is not satisfactory.
66. There has been the full involvement of secondary schools from the outset. This has borne fruit in rapid developments to ensure good continuity from Year 6 to Year 7 and many joint mathematics initiatives including enrichment work. This working partnership means that mathematics teachers in secondary schools already know Year 6 pupils' capabilities at first hand.

### **Support for information and communication technology**

67. From a low and very uneven base, progress has been made recently in improving school facilities, ICT coverage across the curriculum and pupils' attainment. Nevertheless, support for the use of ICT in the curriculum is still unsatisfactory. The LEA has had a broad, highly ambitious vision which is not sufficiently well developed and clarified in the planning papers. The recent ICT development plan sets out some sound aims but lacks the simplicity, clarity and practicality needed to provide sufficient focus to lead effective implementation.

68. The LEA has been hampered in the development of policy and planning by a lack of ICT expertise. In order to make up for the shortage, some specialist external support to assist with planning and school support has been purchased. Schools have derived little benefit from this support.
69. Planning for the implementation of the National Grid for Learning took insufficient account of the lack of capacity of the LEA. On leaving the local ICT consortium, the LEA merged support for the provision and maintenance of equipment for administrative and curriculum ICT under the Council's Information Systems. The magnitude of the task of implementing the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) was not anticipated by the LEA or understood by the information systems team. Information systems, which up to that time had only worked with office systems, had the brief to be prime contractor for wiring, hardware and software for the schools. Liaison with schools in this role was very poor; schools' needs and plans were not understood. Wiring is unsuitable in many schools and in addition the costs for both this and software are excessive by comparison with commercial quotations for similar and better systems. Schools are left with much expensive remedial work to be done.
70. As it became clear that there were serious problems, the Council's senior officers spent considerable time taking control of this difficult situation. The Council has made plans to seek an external strategic partner. The new post of ICT coordinator, proposed by the primary schools and funded by them, has been filled. Major problems are now being resolved and appropriate new arrangements are being made to support the work of the schools.
71. The increasing pool of expertise in schools has not been sufficiently recognised or exploited by the LEA but schools themselves have put it to good use. Despite the poor support provided, ICT is developing well in many schools and excellently in some.

### **Support for schools causing concern**

72. The quality of LEA support for schools causing concern is very good. Very few schools require special measures or have serious weaknesses. One secondary special school has been judged to require special measures. The school was removed within eighteen months, following effective intervention and support by the LEA. A primary school was deemed to have serious weaknesses but has made satisfactory progress and no longer requires monitoring by HMI.
73. The LEA has well-developed procedures for dealing with schools causing concern. These procedures are clearly set out in the EDP and are widely understood by schools. The range of LEA support has included good support for action planning, focused support and advice to improve the quality of management and teaching, the appointment of high calibre additional governors and the effective use of external consultants. The school link adviser plays a crucial role in co-ordinating

this support from various services and in evaluating the school's progress against its action plan.

74. Through rigorous monitoring systems the LEA has identified six schools which are a cause for concern. Their identification is appropriate and timely, and demonstrates the authority's determination to challenge and intervene where there is evidence of under-performance. One school, a special school, is subject to a formal warning notice and is due for closure at the end of the academic year. The five other schools are in receipt of targeted school improvement funding (standards fund) and have appropriate action plans in place. There have been regular progress reports to governors, LEA management and to elected members.
75. The LEA does not formally categorise all schools. Two further primary schools are receiving additional adviser time although the precise focus of this support is less clearly defined. Whilst support provided by the LEA is differentiated according to need, the criteria used for the allocation of support are not transparent. Currently additional advisory support ranges from 2.5 to 11 days.
76. During this inspection, five of the schools causing concern were visited. The overall quality of LEA support has been good. However, while the LEA's emphasis on robust monitoring, challenge and intervention is highly appropriate and effective, in two schools this had a tendency to be stronger than the provision of support.

### **Support for school management**

77. Overall, support for school management is particularly effective and provides good value for money. The provision is set out clearly in Priority 1 of the EDP: 'challenge and support to develop school self review'. A major strength of the LEA's strategy is the focus on building the schools' capability to support their own improvement by developing school self-review through training, the monitoring role of the link adviser and the effective use of data. The LEA is accredited to run the OFSTED/DfEE approved course on school self-review and evaluation and has effectively prioritised schools in this first year of the programme. All advisers are involved in delivery of the training and in the follow-up work in link schools. Evidence from school visits indicates that schools are making good, and often rapid, progress in implementing their own system of self-review, and in improving the clarity and focus of school development planning.
78. The range and quality of training for senior managers are good. This broad programme includes courses offered by the LEA and other regional providers, annual conferences involving nationally recognised experts and well-established network meetings and working groups, all of which are well regarded by schools. The national training programmes for aspiring heads (NPQH) and for serving heads (LPSH) are fully

supported by the LEA; new and acting headteachers receive the support of mentors and the HEADLAMP training scheme. However, there is no programme of headteacher or teacher appraisal in place and the LEA is not currently fulfilling its statutory duties in this respect.

79. The LEA has undertaken a detailed audit and established a baseline of the quality of teaching in schools in order to target support more effectively. The strong focus on the monitoring and evaluation of teaching has enabled schools to identify teachers in difficulties. The LEA has not shirked its responsibility of vigorously addressing any issues of teacher competence. Advisers and personnel officers have worked well together to provide effective and sensitive guidance to headteachers and governors. Weak teachers have been supported to make the necessary improvements.
80. Induction and support arrangements for newly qualified teachers are good. This support is well regarded by schools and includes a planned programme of professional development, mentor training and monitoring by the school's link adviser. In the case of one newly qualified teacher, sensitive intervention by the LEA resulted in subject specialist support being provided by an experienced and able head of department from another local school.

### **Support for governors**

81. The LEA's support for governing bodies is very good and provides very good value for money. Almost all schools buy into the service level agreement, reflecting the overall quality and range of advice which is provided. Governor vacancies are low. Communications between the LEA and school governing bodies are very effective. Governors are well informed through regular briefings with senior officers, termly newsletters and good quality information and guidance, including the recently published governors' handbook. Governors are represented on key decision-making and advisory groups within the authority and are confident that their views are fully considered by LEA.
82. The LEA's strategy and support to improve the quality of governance are a strong dimension within the EDP. A central theme of governor training has been to develop governors' understanding of their monitoring and evaluation role. This aspect is further reinforced by the work of the school link adviser and by the presentation of the annual performance review to the governing body. In this way, governors receive appropriate information, including comparative performance data, on their school's effectiveness.
83. Training courses for governors on all aspects of school governance are of a high quality although the overall take-up is quite low, apart from the basic training for new governors. The LEA has undertaken a thorough audit of training needs, consulted well with governors and has been

energetic in its attempts to provide relevant training that is accessible to a wide range of governors.

84. Support to governors of schools causing concern is a strong feature of the LEA's work, particularly through the regular presentation of progress reports on agreed action plans. When necessary, the LEA has been very effective in recruiting high calibre governors with relevant expertise to strengthen a governing body. A number of governors acknowledge the valuable advice and support they have received from personnel officers and advisers on issues related to capability, redundancy and appointments.

## **Other areas**

### **Education Development Plan Priority 4: Early Years**

85. The monitoring and support of early years education is well managed. Self-review is becoming established. Fruitful liaison is developing between private sector establishments and the maintained nursery school and units. The early years service also liaises effectively with the SEN service. Members of the early years partnership praise the availability of good quality training for childminders and workers in private early years establishments. Take-up is good and carers are now much less isolated.

### **Education Development Plan Priority 5 :Key Stage 3**

86. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 have been steadily rising, but they remain below the national average in the core subjects. This priority intends to develop effective curriculum continuity and progression across Key Stages 2 and 3, and Key Stages 3 and 4.
87. Overall, progress on this priority has been satisfactory. The programme of activities has been well conceived, complements other priorities and is effectively managed by a senior adviser. The establishment of subject leader groups has provided opportunities for primary and secondary staff to work together, to share good practice and to improve the quality of management within their subject areas. The effectiveness of these groups varies. Schools are involved in many useful and interesting initiatives. Coordination and consolidation are not yet sufficient to ensure that all schools and subjects use successful practice to the full.

### **Education Development Plan Priority 7: Curriculum Enrichment**

88. This work is effectively contributing to raising standards. The rationale for the priority is relevant and appropriate. It aims to tackle pupils' limited experience which is frequently referred to in Section 10 inspection reports as inhibiting attainment. It includes diverse activities such as the work-related curriculum, study support and summer schools as well as

strategies to raise the attainment of gifted and talented children, sports and arts enrichment courses.

89. Plans clearly demonstrate how this priority intends to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and management of schools. Activities are raising standards and enhancing the motivation and enthusiasm of pupils. For instance, links with a local university extend expectations and aspirations. A work-related GNVQ qualification has encouraged students to carry on with the qualification post-16. Masterclasses in design and technology at a local secondary school for primary pupils are leading to standards of excellence beyond those expected for pupils' age. A broad range of activities, including in arts and sports, provides experience which has been used to help pupils to improve their standards of writing.
90. The implementation of the priority is well managed. Each strand has an effective management structure which provides coherence and sustainability. Of particular note are the imaginative arrangements based on libraries for developing an effective study support resource and internet access within every child's walking distance. There is good evidence of interrelationships between different funding streams and links are being drawn at an early stage with the developments of Excellence in Cities.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the choice, variety and differentiation of support which is available to schools:**

- the current arrangements for enhancing the range and variety of support which is available to schools should be consolidated;
- a broad banding system which clarifies a more finely differentiated system for deploying support should be devised;
- a service level agreement should be devised which defines the entitlement and devise support packages which schools can select for purchase if they choose.

### **In order to improve the use of performance data:**

- good practice to develop greater consistency in the use of data and setting of challenging target setting should be build on.

### **In order to improve the support for ICT in the curriculum:**

- plans to seek an external strategic partner should be pursued;
- the steering group for the EDP priority on ICT to provide a partnership group to steer the development of a sound strategy for ICT support in schools should be made effective use of;

- schools, where usage of ICT and pupils' standards are low, should be identified and an appropriate plan for improvement developed;
- better use should be made of the expertise which is currently available in schools to improve standards and use of ICT.

**In order to improve the quality of curriculum progression and continuity between school phases:**

- successful initiatives should be consolidated and a clear understanding of the factors and strategies which are required for successful transition developed.

**In order to fulfil statutory requirement for headteacher appraisal:**

- plan with headteachers and governing bodies interim arrangements which provide a smooth progression to the new arrangements.



## **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **Corporate planning**

#### **The clarity, coherence, consistency and feasibility of corporate plans**

91. The Council meets its responsibilities for developing and implementing new requirements and national initiatives in a considered and timely way. Education is the Council's top priority and is also central to its strategies for local regeneration. This is demonstrated by the work which is currently taking place, but it is not sufficiently clearly specified in the strategy guiding economic regeneration, which in all other respects is a valuable document. A partnership, chaired by the local Member of Parliament, has been convened to start the process of developing a community plan. The director of education has contributed to these discussions at an early stage.
92. The Council has met considerable success in regenerating the physical environment. Economic, social and cultural regeneration are longer term developments and will be difficult to tackle fully without new employment opportunities. The Council has made good use of opportunities for regeneration. Funding from SRB has led to the implementation of several relevant educational projects which are focused on raising standards.
93. The education department has produced a strategic plan for 2000-2003 which successfully links the major statutory planning requirements with local developments. Objectives are focused and feasible and linked to Best Value review units. The strategic plan provides an overview which shows clearly how an individual member of staff's work is linked to the overall work of the department, although as yet performance review does not set individual objectives which are drawn from the plan. The plan links appropriately with the Best Value performance plan.

#### **The speed, openness and effectiveness of decision making, particularly financial decision making**

94. The procedures for consultation are effective and improving. Schools are drawn into the early stages of decision-making on budget and other critical strategies. The schools are increasingly being included in a partnership on equal terms with the LEA in initiatives such as Excellence in Cities. Openness, transparency of financial decision-making and good leadership have been successful in building relationships which are based on mutual trust.

#### **The quality of leadership given by elected members and senior officers**

95. Elected members provide good political leadership. The new leadership of the Council has made a commitment to continue the approach of its predecessors. The numerical composition of political parties on the

Council is very finely balanced however and a good degree of consensus already exists between the local parties about developments in education.

96. Senior officers provide good leadership. A firm foundation of policies and procedures has been developed since the inception of the LEA. Officers provide good advice and members are well briefed on standards in schools and school improvement. Officers have thoughtfully and effectively led the implementation of the Government's agenda for education. The leadership of the school improvement strategy is very good and has been successful in engaging schools fully in its development. The partnership between the LEA and schools has evolved and schools recognise that, through consultation and discussion, in the main, officers not only listen to their views but reflect these in developments.

### **Partnership**

97. The LEA plays an active role in a number of appropriate partnerships which promote social inclusion. The structure of partnership is complex and as yet mostly constructed around groups which are planning and leading different initiatives. The major national initiatives for health, education and social services are all developed within Hartlepool.
98. This national architecture of plans and projects is superimposed on a relatively small area. This has led to a considerable number of different working groups generally comprising the same officers, which is very time-consuming. These groups look at the different aspects of provision to help to prevent the relatively small number of families from the risk of social exclusion. This organisation does not lend itself to the holistic and integrated approach required to promote social inclusion. A new structure of a joint strategic group with policy and implementation groups has been developed which should be consolidated further through the drafting of the new children's services plan.
99. Liaison with the police is good. The LEA is fully involved in the community safety strategy and the youth offending team. Joint working arrangements to combat truancy are particularly effective. Liaison with health is satisfactory and the development of a primary care group and health action zone, offer the potential for further effective joint working. Liaison with social services is satisfactory. Protocols are developed to share information on certain aspects, but the confidentiality rules of the separate agencies are still sometimes barriers to effective cooperation.
100. There are good working relationships between the LEA and the three colleges which provide post-16 provision, and also with local universities. The early years partnership is an active group which has a clear mission and clearly set out plans. The partnership has achieved a strong consensus and is achieving exceptionally good cooperation between

both the agencies and the different providers. The Early Years centre developments are seen as further facilitating this work.

### **Management services**

101. In order to make best use of limited resources the Council has decided to take a corporate approach to providing management services to its departments and to schools. This generally works well, although the performance of these services varies. Financial and personnel services are very good. Support for ICT administrative functions is inconsistent and often unsatisfactory.
102. Personnel services provide an efficient and effective service and have considerable experience in educational personnel issues. This has been of great value, as implementation of the school improvement strategy has required governing bodies to secure guidance and support to tackle sensitive staffing issues. Assisting schools with the management of staff absence and sickness monitoring is designed to further enhance schools' capacity to improve.
103. Financial services are provided by the education finance section with others, such as payroll and work on the value-added tax, provided by the corporate finance section. The services are regarded well by schools. Fair Funding has resulted in some new services, such as a bursar scheme, which are bought by almost half of the primary schools. Education Finance has a relevant and largely achievable operational plan for the year although the amount of work needed for a local management of schools review may have been underestimated.
104. Budget planning, preparation, benchmarking and monitoring are strengths and financial information is efficiently shared electronically with schools. School finances are in a healthy state with generally modest balances. Schools are challenged when balances begin to increase beyond 5-10 per cent. The 1999/2000 out-turn statement showed only two primary schools with very small deficits but four of the six secondary schools had overspent. In all cases these were known and most will be removed next year. One school, however, while the deficit is only around two per cent, has not consistently managed to maintain expenditure in line with its agreed budget plan.
105. Support for ICT in administration is inconsistent. The authority has faced some difficulties in delivery. Most schools make good use of administrative ICT, especially in the handling of assessment information, data and target setting. Some schools are hampered in this work by hardware and technical problems and have a need for training in the use of administrative software. The time-saving electronic transfer of data is planned, but is not yet in routine operation.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to effectively discharge performance management:**

- disparate elements in appraisal processes, operational/ development plans, performance indicators and emerging service level agreements should be linked.

### **In order to ensure school deficits are tackled promptly:**

- formal, time-related recovery plans should be agreed and signed with governors, before the LEA accepts the annual budget return.

### **In order to ensure more consistent support for the use of ICT in administration:**

- plans to contract out support for ICT should be proceeded with; and
- a training programme for the use of administrative software and the electronic transfer of data should be planned.

## **SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

### **Strategy**

106. A highly satisfactory strategy for SEN, supported by a detailed action plan, sets out clearly the intention to include more children with SEN in mainstream schools. However, the mission statement, which underpins the LEA's strategy, is not sufficiently clear about the LEA's intended long-term and pragmatic approach to inclusion. The specific plan to include a further 100 children in mainstream schools by 2002 is a challenging but realistic and relevant target and good progress has already been made. Targets to reduce the number of statements have rightly become less of a priority for the LEA as it concentrates its efforts more on the achievement of appropriate inclusive education. The strategy reflects the national agenda very well.
107. A working group has recently been convened to consider some elements of the strategy that still require clarification. These issues include the future role of special schools, the development of resourced provision, the continuity of provision for pupils already successfully placed in primary schools when they transfer to secondary and the continuing use of provision outside the LEA. How these issues will be managed is not developed in detail although officers and headteachers have a range of visionary ideas.
108. The LEA's consultation with schools about the SEN action plan was thorough. Primary, secondary and special schools are generally satisfied with most aspects of the LEA's strategy for SEN. However, parents were less well consulted. It proved difficult for the LEA to communicate its reasons for the closure of one of its special schools. Information to parents is good but nevertheless some parents have a degree of apprehension about inclusion proposals which requires more regular dialogue with the LEA.

### **Statutory obligations**

109. The LEA meets its statutory obligations fully in relation to SEN.

### **School improvement**

110. Special schools are well supported to improve but do not have the access they need to SEN specialists to consider matters such as setting learning targets for pupils with more severe difficulties, specialist advice for the curriculum and the provision of an effective education to those pupils with exceptional needs.
111. Findings from visits to special schools supported the LEA's judgement that a number of pupils placed in special schools should be educated in mainstream schools. The LEA has already placed over 30 children and has made good use of the standards fund to enable it to do so. The

closure of a special school at the end of this year has further enabled pupils with SEN to be included in mainstream where appropriate. Schools vary in the extent to which they are sufficiently well prepared to meet the needs of the children. There are some examples of very good practice, including that in a recently designated Beacon school, but a detailed training package to support the inclusion strategy is not sufficiently well developed. Schools identify a disproportionate number of pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.

112. The management of services, including SEN administration and educational psychology, is good. All services have plans that focus on the achievement of common goals and relate well to the LEA's EDP. However, schools are not clear about their current allocation of support from the educational psychology service which does not enable them to plan or prioritise effectively. The principal educational psychologist has a dual role as a senior education officer and this is working well to enable effective team working.
113. All primary schools purchase specialist support teachers who are appropriately managed within the inspection and advisory service. The support is allocated clearly in relation to need but the service level agreement requires schools to purchase support for all forms of special needs whether these are required by the school or not. Support to pupils with hearing and visual impairment is effective and is provided by a service level agreement with a neighbouring authority.

### **Value for money**

114. Funds to support pupils with statements of SEN are broadly in line with other unitary authorities and LEAs nationally, although a higher percentage has been delegated. The LEA has successfully gained the acceptance of headteachers and teachers that schools have the prime responsibility for providing for pupils with special needs. The LEA has delegated a significant amount of money to enable schools to carry out their responsibilities. This is delegated according to a formula which is based on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals.
115. The funding strategy has the desired effect of keeping statements to a minimum and allowing funds to be used to support pupils rather than in administration. However, the use of free school meals as a measure of SEN may not identify pupils with SEN accurately. The LEA currently has no effective means of monitoring the quality of provision for pupils or their progress, or how the funds are used to support them.
116. In view of the developing strategy which promotes inclusion well and the efficiency with which statements are written, the indications are that value for money is satisfactory.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the implementation of the strategy for inclusion:**

- the SEN action plan should be improved by setting out clear intentions for mainstream provision, including continuity of provision for some pupils already included in mainstream providing detailed costings;
- the mission statement should be made clearer so that it is compatible with the LEA's action plan and more clearly reflects the LEA's long-term intentions and current developments;
- participation of, and consultation with, parents should be improved by providing a regular opportunity for consultation and discussion; and
- in preparation for inclusion, the training needs of staff in mainstream schools should be audited and, in the light of this audit, a training and support programme should be planned.

### **In order to develop better systems to ensure that the LEA receives value for money:**

- better systems to monitor the quality of provision for pupils with SEN and assess the progress they make should be devised;
- criteria, guidance and procedures for moderation to support schools in developing the appropriate use of Stage 3 of the Code of Practice should be developed; and
- the schools' time allocation for the education psychology service should be defined.

### **In order to enhance the improvement of special schools:**

- ensure that special schools have access to specialist advice to support them in the process of school improvement.

## **SECTION 5: ACCESS**

### **Admissions**

117. Admissions are carried out extremely efficiently. The LEA provides good and improving parental advice and documentation and helpful guidance on admissions and appeals to headteachers. All appeals are heard by the end of April and 98 per cent of parents get their first choice of school. Officers have taken the innovative approach of ensuring that parents are fully aware of the implications of transferring children to new schools when they move a relatively short distance.
118. An admissions forum has been established and it is dealing effectively with relevant issues. Recent meetings have made sensible recommendations.

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

119. Planning the supply of school places is very good. Officers have used the advantages of the small size and the relative isolation of the town by having very good data, accurate predictions about future needs and fostering good liaison with the diocesan boards. As a result there is a low percentage of surplus places and no schools with over 25 per cent surplus. In addition, since September 1999, one year ahead of most LEAs, no infant class has over 30 pupils.
120. The school organisation plan is clearly presented. In addition, there are a variety of plans in hand to reduce spare capacity by a further 500 places in primary schools to meet the predicted eight per cent reduction in the pupil population. Officers are waiting for the new DfEE guidance on assessing school capacity before implementing any action plans.
121. Recent history has shown that the LEA will not shirk the responsibility for closing schools. As part of their inclusion and school improvement strategy, one of the three special schools is deemed surplus to requirements and procedures have been put in place to effect its closure. The school organisation committee is effective and well briefed.

### **Property management**

122. Support for property management has been poor. The LEA inherited poorly maintained buildings. Improving the school building stock has not had the same level of sharply focused strategic planning as other aspects of the LEA's work. The result has been a lack of investment, little innovation in accessing alternative funding, poor data and ineffective liaison between the appropriate Council departments.
123. The LEA has recognised, albeit rather late in the day, that its drive for school improvement could be impeded by the poor state of the learning environment. Investment is rapidly improving with good use being made



of the New Deal for schools. Private finance initiatives are now being considered.

124. The collection of condition data for the asset management plan was carried out efficiently. Officers are now in a much better position to use the data effectively but plans to do so are not well formed. The published process of identifying priorities does not recognise the need for transparency, the vital role which headteachers play, or the need to link proposals with schools' development plans.
125. There is no mechanism for ensuring that schools' plans for maintenance and their use of capital allocations are aligned to the emerging priorities from the asset management plan. There are no arrangements in place to maintain a light touch monitoring of schools' maintenance of their buildings. Mechanisms for collecting suitability data are sound and do involve headteachers.
126. Two secondary schools subscribe to property services. Some schools have not been provided with the promised five-year maintenance plan as part of the 'premier' subscription package. The client operation was not sufficiently rigorous where work had not been completed and was not of an acceptable standard. However, many heads reported recent improvements in their relationship with property services and neighbourhood services that are beginning to treat schools as customers.

### **Provision of education otherwise than at school**

127. The strategy and provision for pupils who require education otherwise than at school are satisfactory and the quality of provision is improving. The LEA maintains a good range of provision, which includes a pupil referral unit for secondary-aged pupils. The provision is suitably differentiated to meet pupil needs. An outside contractor provides provision for Year 11. In addition, arrangements for the education of children whose parents wish to educate them at home are appropriately monitored.
128. The LEA has taken appropriate steps to improve the quality of provision. The pupil referral unit was inspected in 1998 and strengths were found to out-weigh the weaknesses. Appropriate action has been taken to follow up the findings of the inspection report and the pupil referral unit is now under new leadership. The provision for excluded pupils is, in the main, already full-time. However, provision for pregnant students and young people with anxieties about attending school is still part-time.
129. Until recently pupils stayed at the pupil referral unit for too long. The LEA, in conjunction with the pupil referral unit, has improved procedures for quickly reintegrating pupils into schools, particularly at Key Stage 3. An appropriate standard for the timely admission of a pupil into the pupil

referral unit following exclusion has been set. The procedures are largely being met and rates of reintegration are improving.

130. A comparatively high number of young women of school age are mothers. Policies to support the education of these young women now enable them to stay in their mainstream schools for as long as possible when they are pregnant. Links with the Social Service department enable the young women to use child-care facilities so that they can return to school. In view of the perceptions of some primary headteachers that single parents find difficulty in maintaining productive contact with the school, this provision could be further strengthened.

## **Attendance**

131. The strategy and support to schools to improve attendance are very good and have contributed to significant improvements in rates of attendance, particularly in secondary schools. Very good stepped procedures are consistently used to monitor attendance. The initial responsibilities of schools for tackling absence are clear and appropriate. The criteria for referral to the education social work service are clear. Intervention to tackle absence is stepped, timely and firm and is combined with good support for parents and children. The procedure culminates, if improvement is not made, in prosecution. Fifty-three prosecutions were made in the last year. Attention is now being given to identifying appropriate action and support for the few families who are being prosecuted for a second time.
132. An excellent range of varied strategies promotes good school attendance. These include a good balance of support for individual pupils, the whole school and building awareness within the community. Strategies, such as truancy free areas and Year 8 conferences, are designed to promote the awareness of the community and pupils to the need for good school attendance. Support to improve the monitoring of attendance by the school is effective. In particular, the annual analysis of attendance statistics contributes to school self-review and the condoned absence working party has designed consistent protocols for use in schools.
133. Liaison with the police and the courts is very good and leads to an effective joint strategy. Regular truancy patrols by police, combined with the education social work service which pre-date the new legal powers, are effective. Procedures for tracking children who move schools without notification are operated consistently and with determination.
134. The education social work service is very well managed. Staff deployment is regularly reviewed to achieve maximum benefits. This year, social workers are deployed to either the primary or secondary schools to help to address attendance problems early by allocating staff specifically to primary schools. Schools have reviewed the effectiveness

of the varied strategies which are used by the service to improve attendance. A service level agreement is negotiated with schools and implementation will be reviewed with them on an annual basis. The service has voluntarily taken part in an experimental Best Value review and this has helpfully identified areas for development, notably increasing the use of ICT for recording and administration. Most of the recommendations have already been tackled.

### **Behaviour support**

135. The behaviour support plan is highly satisfactory and support to schools for improving behaviour is satisfactory. The implementation of the plan and the performance of schools are monitored by a useful range of performance indicators. The targets set to reduce exclusion are appropriate and are likely to be met. Exclusions are carefully monitored and schools are well advised on the legal requirements. Priority 1 of the EDP appropriately includes a number of activities to improve the management and monitoring of behaviour. Due to staff vacancies not all these activities have been developed.
136. The LEA's intention to appoint a multi-disciplinary social inclusion team has largely been overtaken by events. The team has never been fully in operation. Excellence in Cities initiatives and the pupil retention grant have changed the strategic requirements and schools' support needs. Hence the strategy and support are in a state of transition.
137. A service continues to be provided to schools through training, guidance and contracting voluntary groups and the youth service to provide support to small groups of pupils in secondary schools. The pupil referral unit will add to this provision by providing a range of courses for disaffected pupils from September 2000. These activities are valuable in the short-term but are frequently arranged on an ad hoc basis rather than as a contribution to a planned strategy to improve behaviour in schools or to meet the needs of individual pupils. Their effectiveness and the impact on pupil attainment and access to the curriculum need more careful monitoring.
138. The LEA's intentions for future support have been recognised in outline, but the detailed intentions have not been set out. So far the LEA has reviewed and commented on all school plans for the use of the pupil retention grant. Not all the schools visited require support. In schools which do, there is a strategic need to review and improve the management of the whole-school behaviour policy as well as assist secondary schools in the training for specification and monitoring of learning support centres and learning mentors.

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

139. The LEA takes appropriate steps to fulfil its statutory duty to protect children from significant harm. The LEA is appropriately represented on

the Area Child Protection committee. The LEA maintains a list of designated teachers, including the training which they have received. Training is regularly provided on a single and multi-agency basis but is not up-to-date for one or two designated teachers. However, a network of designated teachers meets regularly. The training programme is currently under review with the intention of providing a structure which offers some progression for more specialist teachers and in the light of new guidance and procedures.

140. A jointly funded social services and education project provides good support from social workers for pupils who may have been abused. This resource enables schools to refer children whose educational progress seems to be affected by some traumatic experience and yet may have not met the referral criteria of other agencies. This service also provides a helpline for parents.
141. The LEA is meeting its statutory requirements for health and safety. A health and safety unit which is part of the local authority's corporate services provides support for headteachers and governing bodies which is generally regarded as at least satisfactory.

### **Children and young people in public care**

142. The LEA support to improve the achievement of children in public care is satisfactory. It has good procedures in place which inform schools of children in public care who are attending the school and monitors their progress. All the schools visited are confident that they know the names of the children who attend their schools.
143. Schools follow the LEA's procedures by identifying a teacher who monitors the progress of the children. The teachers have received some training. All children have been placed on Stage 2 of the Code of Practice so that they have an individual education plan and progress is regularly reviewed. However, the LEA recognises that this procedure is not entirely appropriate for all children and it is being amended whilst retaining a commitment to all children in public care having an educational plan.
144. All children in public care have an educational placement, although five young people are not attending. The young people pose significant challenges to both care and education systems. A senior officer monitoring group plans and oversees work with young people who are difficult to place. Nevertheless, one or two cases are drifting as the intentions are not sufficiently clear or timely.
145. Sound monitoring procedures provide a good foundation for the further development of initiatives to improve and support pupils' learning.

## **Minority ethnic children**

146. There are a very small number of children of minority ethnic heritage and for the most part they attend one school. This school receives appropriate teaching and classroom assistance.

## **Strategies to combat racial harassment**

147. Procedures for monitoring racial harassment are adequate. The local authority has reviewed policies and procedures in the light of the recommendations of the Macpherson report.

## **Social exclusion**

148. A very sound basis of policies and procedures has led to some reduction in the number of children who are at risk of social exclusion because of poor educational attainment or lack of access to education. Nevertheless, this area has high rates of unemployment and crime, particularly among young people, and a high incidence of drug abuse and teenage pregnancy.

149. The LEA has played its full part with the other agencies in successfully attracting nearly all the major national initiatives in health, police, education and social services, which are targeted at reducing social exclusion. The LEA is receptive to working with other agencies. So far the co-operative work has focused predominantly on developing each separate initiative.

150. The area is relatively small and the numbers of families at risk are similarly relatively low. In these circumstances, if strategies for early intervention are to be effective, ways need to be found to knit them and the services of the various agencies together in a coherent way to provide a more integrated and holistic approach.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to make maximum use of the asset management data:**

- a more transparent system to identify priorities should be devised, involving headteachers and schools' development plans;
- LEA and school maintenance and development plans to make the best use of available resources should be shared; and
- ensure that schools which have purchased the relevant service receive a five-year maintenance plan.

### **In order to develop a strategy and provide support for improving behaviour and reducing school exclusion in the light of new initiatives and requirements:**

- the requirements for strategic advice, support and monitoring should be identified with schools and the inspection and advisory service, and a programme to meet the requirements should be planned and implemented; and
- the impact of short-term and part-time courses and group work on pupils' attainment, access to the curriculum and behaviour should be monitored.

**In order to improve provision and support for young women of school age who are mothers:**

- plans to ensure that the young women have appropriate support and advice so that they can combine successfully responsibilities for parenting with maintaining their education should be made.

**In order to improve the attainment of children in public care:**

- the individual pupil plans to ensure that they are appropriately targeted to improve pupils' learning and ensure that pupils have access to necessary curriculum enrichment activities and study support should be monitored.

**In order to make full use of national initiatives that promote social inclusion:**

- other agencies should be worked with to ensure a coherent and integrated approach to supporting families and children who are at risk of social exclusion.

## **APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **In order to maintain and develop the current excellent approach to managing and evaluating the implementation of the EDP:**

- the allocation, delegation and distribution of resources for advisory support should be increased, in consultation with schools, in the light of progress in building the capability of schools to take greater responsibility for identifying and contracting their support needs; continue to challenge and monitor the effectiveness of schools' management of their own self-improvement.

### **In order to minimise the potential for burgeoning retirement costs:**

- the LEA's strategy for premature retirement should be reviewed and fully explore all the available options and their detailed implications.

### **In order to improve the choice, variety and differentiation of support which is available to schools:**

- the current arrangements for enhancing the range and variety of support which is available to schools should be consolidated;
- a broad banding system which clarifies a more finely differentiated system for deploying support should be devised;
- a service level agreement should be devised which defines the entitlement and devise support packages which schools can select for purchase if they choose.

### **In order to improve the use of performance data:**

- good practice to develop greater consistency in the use of data and setting of challenging target setting should be build on.

### **In order to improve the support for ICT in the curriculum:**

- plans to seek an external strategic partner should be pursued;
- the steering group for the EDP priority on ICT to provide a partnership group to steer the development of a sound strategy for ICT support in schools should be made effective use of;
- schools, where usage of ICT and pupils' standards are low, should be identified and an appropriate plan for improvement developed;
- better use should be made of the expertise which is currently available in schools to improve standards and use of ICT.

### **In order to improve the quality of curriculum progression and continuity between school phases:**

- successful initiatives should be consolidated and a clear understanding of the factors and strategies which are required for successful transition developed.

**In order to fulfil statutory requirement for headteacher appraisal:**

- plan with headteachers and governing bodies interim arrangements which provide a smooth progression to the new arrangements.

**In order to effectively discharge performance management:**

- disparate elements in appraisal processes, operational/ development plans, performance indicators and emerging service level agreements should be linked.

**In order to ensure school deficits are tackled promptly:**

- formal, time-related recovery plans should be agreed and signed with governors, before the LEA accepts the annual budget return.

**In order to ensure more consistent support for the use of ICT in administration:**

- plans to contract out support for ICT should be proceeded with; and
- a training programme for the use of administrative software and the electronic transfer of data should be planned.

**In order to improve the implementation of the strategy for inclusion:**

- the SEN action plan should be improved by setting out clear intentions for mainstream provision, including continuity of provision for some pupils already included in mainstream providing detailed costings;
- the mission statement should be made clearer so that it is compatible with the LEA's action plan and more clearly reflects the LEA's long-term intentions and current developments;
- participation of, and consultation with, parents should be improved by providing a regular opportunity for consultation and discussion; and
- in preparation for inclusion, the training needs of staff in mainstream schools should be audited and, in the light of this audit, a training and support programme should be planned.

**In order to develop better systems to ensure that the LEA receives value for money:**

- better systems to monitor the quality of provision for pupils with SEN and assess the progress they make should be devised;



- criteria, guidance and procedures for moderation to support schools in developing the appropriate use of Stage 3 of the Code of Practice should be developed; and
- the schools' time allocation for the education psychology service should be defined.

**In order to enhance the improvement of special schools:**

- ensure that special schools have access to specialist advice to support them in the process of school improvement.

**In order to make maximum use of the asset management data:**

- a more transparent system to identify priorities should be devised, involving headteachers and schools' development plans;
- LEA and school maintenance and development plans to make the best use of available resources should be shared; and
- ensure that schools which have purchased the relevant service receive a five-year maintenance plan.

**In order to develop a strategy and provide support for improving behaviour and reducing school exclusion in the light of new initiatives and requirements:**

- the requirements for strategic advice, support and monitoring should be identified with schools and the inspection and advisory service, and a programme to meet the requirements should be planned and implemented; and
- the impact of short-term and part-time courses and group work on pupils' attainment, access to the curriculum and behaviour should be monitored.

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**In order to improve the attainment of children in public care:**

- the individual pupil plans to ensure that they are appropriately targeted to improve pupils' learning and ensure that pupils have access to necessary curriculum enrichment activities and study support should be monitored.

**In order to make full use of national initiatives that promote social inclusion:**

- other agencies should be worked with to ensure a coherent and integrated approach to supporting families and children who are at risk of social exclusion.

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