

**Inspection report**  
**DURHAM**  
**Local Education Authority**

Date of inspection: May 2003

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## **Basic information**

Name of LEA:

Durham

Address of LEA:

County Hall  
Durham  
DH1 5UJ

Lead inspector:

David Halligan HMI

Date of inspection:

May 2003

## Introduction

1. This inspection of Durham local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001). The inspection was concerned with the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.
2. The inspection was based on a range of evidence, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. The evidence also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports; audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and councillors; groups of headteachers; and staff of other departments of the local authority. In addition, views were sought from diocesan representatives, and other agencies and bodies with which the LEA collaborates. The inspection team also considered the first Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in June 1998). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was sent to all schools, and the inspection team considered its results. The response rate to the questionnaire was 78 per cent.
3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgment, which is converted into a numerical grade. The inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made using criteria for each function. These criteria, together with the guidance that the inspection team follows, can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades summarising the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report. The grades relate to the sections of the report which deal with the individual functions. They must be viewed in the light of the written report.
4. Some of the grades are used in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be up-dated regularly such that and the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next assessment.
5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of all aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education uses inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends in Key Stage 3. The overall assessment, published in December 2002, gave star ratings for each local authority for a range of its services, for example social services, benefits, environment. This report is about the local authority's work to support school improvement.

**Commentary**

6. County Durham is an area with formidable social and economic problems. It is the most deprived English county, and among the most deprived quarter of all local authorities, nationally. It is a county of small communities, many of which are former mining villages and need substantial help, if they are to be regenerated.

7. In this difficult context, the primary schools have had success. Early years provision is giving children a very good start to their schooling. The test results at the age of 11 are in line with national ones. Since the first inspection, in 1998, the secondary schools have improved their weak results at the age of 14. The improvement has been faster than the national rate and has brought attainment into line with national figures. The LEA's work has contributed to that improvement. The weakness is at the age of 16. Results in the GCSE remain below national standards. Results in school sixth forms are just in line with national ones but the participation rate is low and consequently the overall attainment of 16 to 19 year-olds is low. Attendance and behaviour have both improved.

8. Durham County Council has a real, and corporate, determination to deal with the issues of regeneration that confront it. From that determination grows strategic strength. Education is central to the work. It is a high priority for the councillors. They, and the officers, provide strong community leadership. The systems for planning and the arrangements for management, including the vital matter of finance, are good. They ensure that the direction of the education department's work is clear, and that the necessary resources are available where they are needed.

9. The LEA is now acting to deal with the weakness in Key Stage 4, and more generally to improve 14 to 19 provision, but it is early days for both. The Key Stage 4 commitment is clear and supported by the budget. However, it is not yet providing a strong enough direction for the schools. For 14 to 19, the situation is rather similar, but further at an even earlier stage of development. The strategy is unclear, as yet. It needs direction. The evidence of this inspection is that the LEA is very capable of dealing with these matters.

10. Of the functions inspected through fieldwork, these are good.

- Corporate planning and its implementation.
  - Decision making.
  - The leadership of officers and members.
  - Working in collaboration with other bodies.
  - The strategy for school improvement and its implementation.
  - Defining, with the schools, monitoring, challenge, support and intervention.
  - Support for numeracy.
  - Assuring the quality and supply of teachers.
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- Meeting statutory duties for SEN.
  - Support for attendance.
  - Support for behaviour.
  - Cleaning and caretaking.
  - Grounds maintenance.

11. In addition, asset management is very good.

12. The remaining functions covered by the Framework for inspection are at least satisfactory.

13. This is a strong record. Twenty-eight functions which had been inspected in the first inspection were inspected through fieldwork. Of these, 23 had improved. The LEA has a highly satisfactory record of improvement. It is held back by the weaknesses in the attainment of the older pupils.

14. It also has a good capacity to deal with the relatively few recommendations made in this report. The authority is led well. It has a history of improvement which is supported by corporate strength. It has an internal evaluation system which identifies problems and leads to improvement.

15. Durham County Council is a good LEA.



## **Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement**

### **Context**

16. In broad terms the social and economic characteristics of County Durham are little changed since the first inspection. The population is about 500,000 and declining. The area remains one in which there is both relative and absolute poverty. The government's index of multiple deprivation shows it to be the most deprived county in England. Over 30 per cent of the population live in wards which are amongst the 10 per cent most deprived in England. This is about double the proportion in Northumberland and Lancashire, which are the next most deprived counties. It puts Durham among the most deprived quarter of local authorities nationally.

17. The bulk of the county is rural. Durham City is the largest urban area with a population of about 38,000. Most of the population of the county lives in small towns or villages. Many of these in the east and centre of the county were formerly mining villages and it is in those that deprivation is at its most severe. There is also deprivation in some of the upland rural wards. The two most north-westerly are among the most deprived 30 per cent, nationally.

18. The 1991 census showed 10 per cent of the population had higher education qualifications, compared with 13.5 per cent nationally. Higher social classes made up 22.6 per cent of the population compared with 31 per cent nationally. The first report showed that the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was similar to the national proportion. It has declined since then and now stands at 20.3 per cent in primary schools, and 17.9 per cent in secondary schools. However, the national figure has also declined and the relationship between the two is little changed.

19. The school aged population is lower by nearly 2000 since 1999. Most of that reduction has been in the primary phase, establishing a decline which has yet to work through into the secondary schools. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils remains, as it was in 1999, below 1 per cent, compared with the national 13 per cent. When Traveller children are included, the proportion of minority ethnic pupils is about 1.5 per cent.

20. In 2001, 3.5 per cent of primary pupils and 5 per cent of secondary pupils had statements of special educational need. The level of statements in primary schools was well above that nationally and in similar authorities.

21. There are two Education Action Zones in former mining areas on the east coast of the county.

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## Performance

22. Attainment at the ages of 7, 11 and 16 has improved at rates very close to the national improvement. In the secondary phase, there has been more rapid improvement at the age of 14. However, the rate of improvement at the age of 16 has left performance at 16 as it was in 1998, at the time of the first inspection, below the national average, and below that in similar authorities.<sup>1</sup>

23. At the end of Key Stage 1, the unvalidated data for 2002 shows that in reading, the proportion of pupils attaining level 2 and above in the national curriculum tests was 85.6 per cent compared with the national 84.5 per cent. In writing, the equivalent figures are 86.5, compared with 86.3. In mathematics they are 91.5, compared with 90.8. In all three areas, they are now, as they were in 1998, in line with the national figures.

24. At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2002, in English 74.6 per cent of the pupils obtained level 4 or higher, equal to the national proportion. In science, the percentage was 88.1 in the LEA and 86.9, nationally. In mathematics, 76.2 per cent of pupils attained the required level, compared with 73.4 nationally. In English and mathematics, the scores, as in 1998 are in line with the national figures.

25. In the Key Stage 3 tests in 2002 in English, 65.1 per cent got level 5 or higher, compared with 67.1, nationally. In mathematics, the figures were 66.2, compared with 68. In science they were 65, compared with 67.5. Results in mathematics and science have remained statistically in line with national figures, compared with 1998 but the gap with the national figures has narrowed. In English, the gap has narrowed to the extent that performance is now in line with that nationally; it was below in 1998.

26. In the GCSE, the percentage of pupils obtaining 5 or more A\* to C passes is now, as it was in 1998, below the national average and below the average for similar authorities. The percentage for Durham in 2002 was 41.5 per cent, compared with the national 49.9. At 5 or more A\* to G, the percentage was 88.3, again below the national average which was 90.9.

27. Results in the GCE A level in 2000, which is the last year for which comparative figures are available, were in line with the national average. In advanced GNVQ, they were below.

28. Overall, however, the number of permanent exclusions has fallen since 1997/8. In 1999/2000, which is again the last year for which comparative figures are available, the rate of exclusion in primary schools was in line with the national figure; in secondary schools it was above.

29. Attendance, in both primary and secondary schools, has continued to be in line with national levels. In 2001, it was 93.8 per cent in primary schools and 90.6 per cent in

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<sup>1</sup> Durham's statistical neighbours are Doncaster, Wakefield, Cumbria, Rotherham, Barnsley, Derbyshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, North Lincolnshire and Redcar and Cleveland.

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secondary schools. The LEA's figures for 2001/2002 show attendance in both phases to have been at the highest levels they have recorded.

30. In their last Ofsted school inspections, 75.3 per cent of the primary schools were good or very good, compared with 72 per cent, nationally. By contrast, among the secondary schools, 52.8 per cent were good or very good, compared with 67 per cent nationally.

### **Council structure**

31. The council has 61 members. Two are conservative, three are independent, four are liberal democrat and 52 are labour. The council's political organisation is that of a leader and an executive committee known as the cabinet. That committee consists of the leader, the deputy leader and eight other councillors, each responsible for a service area, one of which is developing lifelong learning.

32. Scrutiny of lifelong learning is exercised by a sub-committee of the council's scrutiny and overview committee. It has become effective in reviewing and changing policy, for example, recently in promoting safe routes to schools. It has also been involved in the formation of policy through work to develop the council's strategy for special educational needs. Nearly all councillors are involved in either the executive, or the scrutiny functions of the council.

### **Funding**

33. The LEA's formula spending share for primary and secondary education is above the average for English counties. Its income from Standards Fund grant is significantly more so. This is because of the comparatively high levels of deprivation in the schools. The LEA has been successful in securing a wide range of other revenue and capital grants to support the education service. Bidding for grant is co-ordinated effectively. Consultation with schools on grant application and deployment is satisfactory. Information and support for schools in making best use of opportunities for external funding has been improved recently and is now good. There is a single point of contact for initial enquiries and a coordinated library of information.

### **The LEA's strategy for school improvement**

34. The strategy was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now good. The key strength of the strategy is that it binds together work carried out under the Education Development Plan (EDP) with other school improvement activities. These include those in the two Education Action Zones (EAZs), those in the excellence cluster, funded under the Excellence in Cities programme, and some others financed by the local strategic partnerships through the neighbourhood renewal fund. Starting this new financial year, the strategy has been supplemented by a new initiative, specifically for Key Stage 4.

35. The EDP is a good plan. It is based on a thorough analysis of the implementation of the first EDP. That analysis, in particular, identifies the schools' weaknesses in attainment at the end of Key Stage 4. More generally, the plan's audit of need makes effective use of performance data, and of the findings of Ofsted inspections. The plan deals with both

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national and local priorities, the latter placing a particular emphasis on combating the effects of social and economic disadvantage. In this respect, the plan's stated priorities and proposed actions relate strongly to identified need. They lead logically to the proposed outcomes which are, themselves, assessed against criteria. Some, though not all, of these have the weakness that they are not specific enough. For example, they refer to a percentage or number being increased, rather than stating explicitly what amount of increase is planned. The EDP itself is only one level of a coherent hierarchy of planning for school improvement and the delivery of its priorities is articulated very effectively in the service plans of the education department.

36. The improvement strategy is strengthened by the close relationship between the LEA and the two EAZs. The LEA assisted the zones through the process of their setting up and is now represented on their management bodies. The zones and the LEA share some staff, for example literacy consultants. Also, literacy teaching materials, developed in the EAZs are now being used in the LEA's schools. The excellence cluster was set up in September 2002, in a deprived part of the county. Its particular initiatives are in literacy, setting up a learning support unit, providing learning mentors, and improving support for gifted and talented pupils. There is a good system for disseminating successful practice to other schools, through the arrangements for evaluation of the work by headteachers from other areas.

37. The Key Stage 4 strategy involves providing secondary schools, in each of the next three years, with £2 million of new money which the council has added to the education budget. The renewal of the grant for each school after this initial year will be subject to schools' satisfying the LEA that satisfactory changes are happening. The money will go mainly to those schools not receiving the government's leadership incentive grant, but those receiving the grant will receive some extra money because the grant is not dedicated to Key Stage 4. The central strength of the strategy is that the LEA has now acted on the weakness in performance that has been evident for several years. The strategy is strong because schools are required to account for spending the money on the key stage, rather than absorbing it into their budgets more generally, and because the schools have to agree an action plan with the LEA's inspectors. The strategy suggests areas which may be covered in the action plan. Its weakness is that, at this stage, it does not put forward a clear enough view of the matters the schools must deal with. Thus, although it refers to teaching and learning, it does not give these matters the centrality they deserve, if expectations of pupils are to be raised.

38. The implementation of the school improvement strategy is good, though it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the new strategy for Key Stage 4. The first EDP was implemented successfully, except that it did not secure improvement in Key Stage 4. After the first year of the current EDP, the LEA can demonstrate progress with all of its priorities except in meeting its targets for academic attainment. The LEA met its target for mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2002, but failed to do so in English. It met none of its targets for the end of Key Stage 3 and also failed to meet its GCSE targets. The gaps between the 2002 performance and the 2003 targets are such as to make it unlikely that the LEA will reach its targets, and even less likely that it will meet its targets for 2004, when the local public service agreement will add a further one per cent. The targets agreed by the Department for Education and Skills have proved unrealistic.

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**Recommendation**

Improve the Key Stage 4 strategy by setting out the weaknesses that schools should deal with and by placing greater emphasis on teaching and learning.

**The allocation of resources to priorities**

39. In the previous inspection the LEA's targeting of resources to priorities was to be satisfactory. It has improved since and is now highly satisfactory. The extent to which the LEA has passed on the education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) increases to schools has fluctuated over recent years. However, the net effect has been to maintain an expenditure significantly above the SSA level. This reflects the position of education as a key corporate priority. The LEA has more than fully passed on the increase in Schools Formula Funding Share for 2003/4. It is developing a budget strategy for the three years ahead but significant work remains to be done on this. The financial position overall is sound. There is a proven record of prudent financial management, and the measures to ensure budgetary control are effective. The review of budgets is conducted with rigour and the LEA has acted on the findings of that review, where necessary.

40. Within the education budget, spending in 2002/3 was significantly below SSA for primary schools (94 per cent) but above for secondary schools (101 per cent). Spending on under fives and other education services was well above SSA. This was particularly so for the former and reflects a long standing policy priority. Overall revenue spending per pupil, inclusive of government grant, was just above the average for English counties, as indicated below:

	Durham	English counties	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£2,778	£2,740	£2,929
Secondary Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£3,530	£3,476	£3,768

Source: 2002/2003 Section 52 returns

41. Consultation with schools on the budget is good and there is a real sense of partnership. The LEA has moved quickly and effectively to establish a schools forum. The forum met on four occasions prior to the LEA's budget being decided. There was extensive discussion and the forum's views had a strong influence on the decisions taken. The LEA intends to use the forum for consultation on all aspects of its education spending in the future, rather than on the more limited range of issues required by statute. This is a positive step.

42. Recent changes within the education budget have closely reflected the LEA's key school improvement priorities. Much of the growth in funding in recent years has been used to promote social inclusion and to pay for the Key Stage 4 strategy. Control of education budgets is generally sound but there has been significant growth and overspending on home to school transport. This is due to the inflationary pressure common to many LEAs, as well as to the development of inclusive provision for pupils with SEN, and some recent success in improving post 16 staying on rates. Reasonable steps are being taken to control costs.

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43. The LEA currently delegates a rather higher proportion of total spending on schools than the average for English counties. However it devolves a smaller proportion of Standards Fund grant. The LEA's long standing commitment to maintaining education spending above the level of SSA has provided reasonable stability for schools. They receive information early in the budget making process about their likely allocations and are also provided with indications of their funding for future years. However, in the absence of a clearly defined medium term financial strategy for the LEA, the reliability of the projections is limited.

44. The LEA maintains a reasonably detailed model of specific spending needs which it uses to revise its formula allocations to schools each year. This model is not comprehensive, nor has its underlying educational rationale been explained to the schools. However, the LEA has taken sound measures for the current year to adjust its funding formula to moderate the potential turbulence for schools involved in changes to the national funding framework.

45. The LEA has recently embarked on a major review of its primary and secondary school provision. A key issue is the revenue cost of maintaining the many small primary schools. The major factor in this is the small school protection element of the funding formula. At present the relationship between this aspect of the formula and the LEA's school planning policies is unclear.

46. Support for school budget planning is good. Finance staff and school link inspectors collaborate to ensure that budget planning is part of school improvement planning more generally. School spending is monitored effectively and intervention is effective, at least in terms of avoiding end of year deficits. The LEA has been less successful in dealing with school surpluses. These are comparatively high. However, early signs for the 2002/3 financial year are that worthwhile impact has been made on reducing surpluses in primary schools.

### **Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value**

47. The LEA's strategies to promote continuous improvement were not judged in the previous inspection. They are highly satisfactory overall, but there are significant variations in practice at individual service level. The LEA has a good framework of strategic and service plans. The translation of corporate policies and priorities into operational planning can be clearly tracked from one document to another. This extends to the planning of activities for service teams and individual members of staff. The LEA has established sound principles for effective planning and the monitoring and evaluation of performance. These principles are fully and clearly reflected in guidance on writing service plans and in the frameworks established for performance monitoring. The arrangements emphasise monitoring the intended outcomes of the services, rather than just the progress in taking the agreed action.

48. At present, however, the quality of plans and, in particular, the inclusion of outcome indicators is variable. The higher level strategic plans are relatively strong in this. There are indicators against which to assess progress in delivering the corporate policy priorities for education. Much school improvement work is strong in this. In areas of activity less directly related to pupils' performance, there is much less clarity about how to measure outcomes and consequently, the evaluation of some plans is unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, there are some

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good examples of the LEA's performance management processes identifying weaknesses and of successful remedial action.

49. The LEA is moving away from using a comprehensive programme of Best Value reviews as the principal means of reviewing service objectives and performance. This is because Best Value principles are now soundly embedded in its framework for service planning, monitoring and evaluation. That framework includes conducting more fundamental performance reviews as necessary in areas of high risk. Nonetheless, formal Best Value reviews are still used to undertake a fundamental evaluation of some functions. The emphasis here has shifted, rightly, to major cross cutting reviews such as services for children. The external auditor has given unqualified approval to the 2002/3 Best Value Performance Plan.

***Recommendation***

Improve the evaluation of services by identifying and using measurable indicators of success more consistently.

## **Section 2: Support for school improvement**

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

50. Since the previous inspection, there has been improvement. The work is at least satisfactory, and in many cases it is good.

51. The LEA has acted on the recommendations made in the first inspection report. It now has a coherent strategy for monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools. The schools recognise the improved support and leadership provided by officers. The respective roles and responsibilities of the schools and the LEA are now clear. There has been success in implementing the national school improvement strategies and in dealing with schools causing concern. The school improvement service is well led and is effective, the weakness in performance in Key Stage 4 notwithstanding. The service has the confidence of the schools. It provides highly satisfactory value for money.

### **Monitoring, challenge and intervention**

52. At the time of the previous inspection, arrangements for monitoring, challenge and intervention were unsatisfactory. Since then, and following the implementation of the report's recommendations, the work has become good.

53. Following consultation with schools, in January 2000 a new and clear policy was produced. It sets out the criteria for intervention and the support to which schools are entitled. It also defines the roles of the inspectors and the consultants. Each school is assigned to one of five categories of need. Those in the lowest category receive a basic entitlement of two half day visits per year. This increases proportionate to need in the various higher categories. Schools understand and support the system.

54. The link inspectors' work has been re-organised effectively. There are primary phase inspectors and secondary inspectors who carry subject responsibilities. Each inspector is allocated to one of four areas of the county. All primary inspectors have a background of headship experience. This is not the case with secondary inspectors but the education department supplements its own staff with associate headteachers with the necessary expertise.

55. There are effective procedures for reviewing the categorisation of the schools and for moving them through the categories. These procedures involve other officers, as well as the inspectors, so that all of the services involved in school support take part in the review processes.

### **The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need**

56. This was unsatisfactory in the last inspection. The report recommended a review of the deployment of link and subject inspectors to ensure that support was provided where it was needed. It also recommended that inspectors' work should be more consistent and that the findings from their visits should be reported to the schools. These recommendations have

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been met. The deployment of support is now good because it is closely related to schools' needs.

57. Officers collect and analyse relevant information for each school. This includes the reports of school visits by the link inspectors and other support officers. The reports, which are now given to the schools and governors, are supplemented by performance statistics and information from Ofsted inspections. Together this evidence forms a clear profile of each school.

58. The evidence is the basis for the monthly review of the categorisation of each school. As circumstances and data are up-dated the needs of each school are reviewed and support adjusted as required. The department also has a detailed database which contains information on all schools and to which all officers can gain access. As a result, they know the schools well. Senior officers monitor the deployment of their staff closely and respond to emergencies or crisis by reallocating support if necessary. This combination of knowledge of the schools and effective deployment of staff enables support to be directed where it is most needed.

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

59. In the previous inspection, this was highly satisfactory. It continues to be so.

60. The main part of this work is visiting by link inspectors. The core of the visiting is provided by the two half day visits dealing with standards, targets, teaching and learning, performance data, and leadership and management.

61. The autumn meetings deal with target setting, using a thorough analysis of performance data provided by the education department. The data provided informs the target setting process well. The work has a number of strengths. There is a clearly defined process for setting targets and schools see that process as rigorous. The schools are challenged by the officers when they judge the targets to be too low or to be unrealistically high. Nevertheless, the difficulties schools have experienced in reaching the attainment targets, particularly in Key Stage 4, suggest that the use of the target setting process to secure school improvement has weaknesses.

62. Schools have been supported and offered training in self-evaluation. Between 60 and 70 per cent of the schools have attended the courses. The work is supported by link advisers who monitor progress and seek to ensure that self-evaluation informs school development planning. LEA monitoring shows improvement in schools' self-evaluation but the work has yet to be used by the schools to improve school development planning in such a way as to raise standards in Key Stage 4.

63. Monitoring and challenge has improved since the previous inspection. They have helped to raise attainment, for example in Key Stage 3, but there remains more to be done, particularly in Key Stage 4.

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**Recommendation**

Ensure that monitoring and challenge, including target setting and schools' self-evaluation are used to promote better school development planning, particularly in Key Stage 4.
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**The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools**

64. In the previous inspection, this work was highly satisfactory, although the strategy for identifying and supporting schools causing concern was not clear to schools themselves. They are now much clearer about the strategy and support in this area is good.

65. At present, the LEA has identified and placed 18 schools in its category of causing concern and a further four schools have been identified with serious weaknesses by Ofsted inspections. There are no schools in special measures and overall the percentage of schools with serious weaknesses or requiring special measures is well below that of statistical neighbours and nationally. In the last year, two schools have been removed from the serious weaknesses category.

66. The LEA has an effective strategy for supporting schools causing concern. The schools receive well-planned, differentiated support through separate school and LEA action plans. There is a system for appointing additional governors to schools if necessary. This has been used successfully. Monitoring groups, made up of LEA officers, headteachers, governors and elected members produce regular progress reports for the schools. These are also presented to the executive and scrutiny committees on a regular basis.

**Support for literacy**

67. Support for literacy was good at the time of the previous inspection. It continues to be so. No fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection.

**Support for numeracy**

68. In the previous inspection support for raising standards in numeracy was highly satisfactory. There were weaknesses in liaison between primary and secondary schools, monitoring effectiveness and the impact of the work on standards. Since then the LEA has dealt with these weaknesses and the support is now good. Attainment is above the national level at the end of Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, the targets for 2003 and 2004 which are very high, are unlikely to be met.

69. The LEA continues to implement the numeracy strategy effectively. Good strategic planning is provided by the Education Development Plan and supported by the numeracy team's operational planning. However, some of the planning lacks clarity in its arrangements for monitoring actions and in its use of success criteria.

70. The schools are supported effectively. There is a good training programme which deals with both local and national priorities. Intensive support is provided where necessary

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and deployed well on the basis of an audit of need and a thorough analysis of performance data. Schools not receiving intensive support have other support systems, including network meetings for teachers and the use of leading mathematics teachers.

71. The numeracy team has produced a wide range of good support materials for teaching and learning. Additionally, a numeracy web site has been developed to hold the support materials. This is an important source of up-to-date information for teachers.

72. Two consultants work with a cross phase brief and have produced some good quality transition units for schools in order to improve liaison between primary and secondary schools. There has been an increase in secondary teachers forming links with primary teachers and observing lessons in Key Stage 2.

73. The LEA is starting to promote greater use of numeracy across the curriculum, especially in Key Stages 1 and 2. One consultant, working with leading mathematics teachers is producing work in geography. The literacy and numeracy teams are holding joint planning meetings and the summer school programme includes much cross-curricular work. The consultants are also looking at ways to improve the use of information and communication technology in numeracy.

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

74. The LEA's support for information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory. It was not part of the previous inspection.

75. Strategic planning for ICT is incorporated as a strand in three of the national priorities in the Education Development Plan. This is supported by two further plans which are in draft, pending approval. In combination, these plans provide a satisfactory approach to developing ICT. They also set targets. However, there is little analysis of present performance and actions are not clearly linked to performance indicators in operational plans. As a consequence, progress in the implementation of the plans cannot be measured effectively.

76. The management and organisation of ICT support has been changed recently. It has been simplified by amalgamating formerly separate services under a single management. The curriculum support it provides is satisfactory. It is valued by primary schools more highly than by secondary schools.

77. A strong team of five consultants supports the primary schools. It provides a training programme, consultancy in schools, and good teaching materials. Officers are developing a website to hold the curriculum materials and to disseminate good practice.

78. The LEA has met, or is on track to meet, the national targets. Schools presently meet the nationally required ratios of pupils to computers and teachers will have received training through the new opportunities fund by the required deadlines. Broadband provision is being extended to the schools. However, the corporate ICT service and the inspection service do not work closely together enough and this is impeding the planning and provision of support for the schools.

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**Recommendations**

Improve strategic and operational planning for ICT by making more use of performance indicators to measure success in implementing the plans.

Strengthen collaboration between the corporate ICT service and the education department in order to improve the planning and provision of support for schools.

**Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3**

79. The previous inspection reported on the LEA's Key Stage 3 initiative, which had been set up in advance of the national strategy. The LEA has acted on the recommendations made in the report. The work has improved and the LEA has, building on its earlier work, been successful in its start on the implementation of the national strategy. Since the first inspection, attainment at the age of 14 has improved. The support is highly satisfactory.

80. There is a good, well-managed team of consultants. The analysis of a wide range of performance data ensures the effective identification of schools for intensive support. There is a highly satisfactory programme of training to support the delivery and introduction of the strands. Schools were very complimentary of the quality of training and support provided. The core training for English was less well-received.

81. The English and mathematics strands are well established in the schools and the more recent strands of ICT, science and foundation subjects are being introduced effectively. There are good links with primary consultants and networks of primary and secondary teachers have been set up. These have enabled the development of teaching materials which are promoting transition work between Key Stages 2 and 3. There are good examples in all of the strands.

82. A start has been made on developing provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum. There are some examples of good practice in literacy. However, cross-curricular work is under-developed as is improving boys' attainment.

**Recommendation****In order to make school improvement more effective:**

- improve support for Key Stage 3 by placing greater emphasis on the cross-curricular development of the strategy and on raising boys' attainment.

**Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers**

83. The previous inspection did not deal with this matter. The support is good.

84. The percentage of minority ethnic children, including Travellers is one and a half per cent. In national terms this is very low and the numbers in any one year are below the point at which statutory targets have to be set. However, the services set their own targets in order to assess the success of their work. The LEA's analysis shows that minority ethnic primary school pupils are performing at the same level as their peers.

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85. Provision and support for the pupils is made in partnership with Darlington LEA. The partnership provides an education service for Traveller children and a language support service. The services are staffed by a range of personnel offering multiple skills and expertise. Schools that use the support rate it highly and regard it as providing good value for money.

86. All children known to the Traveller service receive education in Key Stages 1 and 2. Most attend school and the others are provided for by a mobile service. Access to early years education has increased significantly over the last year. There has also been the highest recorded percentage of Traveller pupils in secondary education this year. The LEA and the support services are collecting and analysing performance data for these children and are monitoring the attainment and progress made by each individual.

87. The data is used to identify underachieving pupils effectively and to deploy resources to support them. The services keep clear records and personal profiles for each child, including individual targets. This data shows that individual pupils generally make satisfactory progress. The services have highly satisfactory strategic and operational plans with targets and priorities outlining clear action points and officers responsible for each action. Schools also receive good support and guidance in production of their policies for example, race equality policies.

88. The two services offer support to schools in a variety of ways including delivery of good quality training and school support, and the production of high quality teaching and learning materials for all key stages. The services are also building strong partnerships with organisations including Connexions, Sure Start and local colleges. The Traveller service runs a mobile resource/classroom to take the support to local communities around the county. The services disseminate case studies of good practice. They also make good teaching materials available on the LEA website.

### **Support for gifted and talented pupils**

89. In the previous inspection this area was not inspected. The LEA is providing highly satisfactory support overall, though there is a weakness in the provision for Key Stage 4.

90. The LEA has included the work in the priorities of the Education Development Plan and reinforced it by producing of an authority policy and operational development plan. Work with gifted and talented pupils is also being developed in the excellence cluster and through excellence challenge. Good progress is being made. Two years ago only 14 per cent of the schools had a co-ordinator and policy for gifted and talented provision. Now this figure is over 80 per cent.

91. The LEA and schools are analysing the performance of more able pupils and setting realistic targets for improvement, at the end of each key stage. The LEA's data shows that the able pupils in primary schools are making better progress than those in secondary schools. This is a particular weakness in view of the low attainment in Key Stage 4.

92. The LEA is supporting and monitoring the work in a variety of ways. Wherever possible, the support is directly linked to existing school priorities. Some schools have concentrated on supporting specific subjects or groups, for example in primary literacy.

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There has been a major emphasis in the training programme on teaching and learning styles and classroom management in all phases. The support teams have developed a good range of support materials for both teachers and pupils.

93. Developing transition activities is a priority in the LEA's strategy. Satisfactory progress is being made in encouraging links between primary and secondary schools. The LEA has successfully organised five gifted and talented summer schools in each of the last five years with 450 pupils from years six and seven taking part over that period. Officers are able to show that pupils attending the summer schools make better progress than pupils who do not go to them.

***Recommendation***

Improve support for gifted and talented pupils in secondary schools in order to raise attainment in Key Stage 4.

**Support for governors**

94. In the previous inspection, the LEA's support for governors was good. It continues to be so. No fieldwork was carried out.

**Support for school management**

95. The support for school management was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It remains so, and no fieldwork was carried out.

**Support for early years**

96. Support for early years was not covered in the previous inspection. It is very good. Early years education has been a longstanding priority for the council.

97. The LEA's early years and childcare partnership was set up before the first inspection and is well supported by the LEA. The Early Years and Childcare Plan is clear and comprehensive.

98. Provision for early years is an important part of the LEA's work on social inclusion. Accordingly, the partnership is represented in a number of other bodies, and local partnerships. This enables the council to ensure that early years provision is coherent with its other social inclusion initiatives, and that resources are allocated according to local needs.

99. The LEA has taken advantage of falling rolls in the primary phase to make much early years provision in school premises. Some of this provision is by the LEA itself and some by private providers. There is a place for every four year-old whose parents want it, and for over 85 per cent of three year-olds. The level of provision is very good and meets government targets. The target for three year olds was met a year early.

100. The LEA gives very good professional support to early years settings and has effective arrangements for monitoring their quality. The council developed its own scheme for baseline assessment, which is now one of the most widely used throughout the country.

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Providers use the scheme to establish the children's starting points on entry, to plan the curriculum, to identify special educational needs and to set targets for individual children. The LEA has developed materials for use in early years settings which are widely used and highly effective. There are also effective arrangements and training to support special educational needs and to develop early literacy and numeracy skills.

### **Support for 14-19 education**

101. This function was not covered by the previous inspection. It is unsatisfactory.

102. Performance in the GCSE is unsatisfactory. Moreover, the LEA's own data indicate that the progress made by the pupils between Key Stages 2 and 4 is less than the national average. The new Key Stage 4 initiative is intended to deal with this problem. However, the LEA and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) face significant difficulties in developing the curriculum for students aged fourteen to nineteen. For post-16 students, provision is geographically dispersed and group sizes are too small to be efficient. In some localities, the range of courses offered is too small. However, it is difficult to rationalise the provision without imposing unacceptably long journeys on students. The overall attainment of the cohort of young people at the ages of 17 and 18 is a cause for concern. Although performance at A and AS levels in the sixth forms is in line with the national average, the staying on rate after the age of 16 is the lowest in England.

103. The LEA has been successful in establishing a partnership approach with the LSC and providers of education for students aged between 14 and 19. There is real commitment to this from all partners as well as the beginning of co-operation between the providers. Schools are genuinely supportive of the LEA and its efforts to secure improvement. Nevertheless, strategy in this area is neither clear nor developed enough to ensure the effective collaboration of all providers and to secure improvement. The crucial need to increase participation has yet to be met.

### ***Recommendation***

Develop and implement, in collaboration with all partners, a coherent and practical strategy to improve participation and attainment for all young people between 14 and 19.
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### **The effectiveness of services to support school management**

104. The previous inspection did not judge the support provided for schools in procuring goods and services. It is highly satisfactory.

105. There is effective consultation with schools about service performance and development. The consultative arrangements do not make undue demands on headteachers' time. The LEA's marketing of services to schools is well co-ordinated. The choice offered is reasonable and meets the needs of most schools. Pricing information is clear. Useful guidance on procurement is available to schools, in terms of both generic advice and specialist client support services. There are good arrangements for ensuring that the support services are effective in monitoring school performance.

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106. The LEA's **financial support service** for schools was good at the time of the previous inspection; the **personnel service** was highly satisfactory; and the support for both **administrative ICT** and **property management** services was satisfactory. These services were not subject to fieldwork in this inspection. Service standards have been maintained in each case.

107. Support for **catering** was not covered in the previous inspection. The service overall is satisfactory. The client support service offered by the LEA is good. The main contract for providing the meals themselves was let to a private sector provider in 2000 for a five-year period. It was based on a relatively low cost to the LEA for each free school meal provided. Many primary schools are concerned about the quality of food and the extent of menu choice provided. This includes the provision of healthy eating options. Steps have been taken by both the LEA and the contractor to improve provision and increase the take-up of both free and paid meals. In individual cases these have had some success. Reasonable steps are taken to seek the views of pupils and schools. There is also an active educational programme to promote healthy eating. The concerns of the schools notwithstanding, the take-up of free school meals from those eligible in the primary schools is similar to the average for English counties.

108. Support for **cleaning and caretaking** and **grounds maintenance** was also not covered in the previous inspection. Provision is good in both cases. The great majority of schools employ their own cleaning and caretaking staff rather than a contractor. Direct provision for grounds maintenance is mainly undertaken either by school staff or through a contract with the LEA's in-house maintenance service. Whatever the delivery arrangements chosen by schools, LEA support is good.

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

109. The previous inspection did not cover this. The work is good.

110. The recruitment and retention of teachers has not been a major issue and the percentage of unfilled vacancies has been in line with that of statistical neighbours. Last year it was better still: there were no problems with unfilled vacancies. The percentage of headteachers leaving post is low and the authority is successful in recruiting newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This situation is generally favourable but the LEA is not complacent and has several strategies to maintain and improve the position.

111. There is a coherent and comprehensive training programme. NQT's have access to support, training and mentoring as part of a well-planned induction programme. There is support for new headteachers and the LEA has programmes to encourage teachers to become effective middle managers and to seek further promotion.

112. The LEA has established an agency system to provide supply teachers. It has advantages over local commercial agencies because its fees are lower and schools may appoint suitable supply teachers to full time posts without having to pay an extra fee. This is an effective arrangement which keeps supply teachers in the county and eases the appointments process.



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113. The present position is highly satisfactory, but the LEA is aware that it may worsen in the future as falling rolls bring more temporary contracts and the teacher population ages. Already there is a reduction in the numbers of teachers applying for vacant posts.

### **The effectiveness of services to support school improvement**

114. In the previous inspection the effectiveness of services to support school improvement was satisfactory, further improvement has been made, it is now good. There is clear and strong vision for school improvement which is translated into service plans which are clearly understood by schools.

115. In the last inspection the deployment of staff to support school improvement was unsatisfactory. The LEA provided standard allocations of time to all schools which were too high to represent support in inverse proportion to success. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now highly satisfactory as a result of the development of a clear strategy for monitoring and intervention which ensures the differentiated allocation of officers' time to schools. The changes which have followed from this have improved the strategic planning of the services. In the last inspection this was unsatisfactory. It is now highly satisfactory.

116. In the last inspection the effectiveness of performance management to support school improvement was highly satisfactory. It remains so. There are very sound induction procedures for new staff and good training and or staff development.

117. The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement was highly satisfactory in the last inspection and continues to be so. The effectiveness of the service is, weaknesses in Key Stage 4 notwithstanding, highly satisfactory. The schools are benefiting from its work.

118. The value for money provided by the services was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now highly satisfactory. Schools now understand the costs of the services and how funds are allocated to school improvement work. The cost of the service is in line with that in similar LEAs, and the service is effective.

## **Section 3: Special educational needs**

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

119. The previous inspection identified significant shortcomings in the LEA's arrangements for special educational needs. There was no effective strategy to promote the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools. Statutory duties were not properly met. School improvement functions and the value for money provided by the LEA were poor. The LEA has acted effectively to deal with those shortcomings. All of the work is at least satisfactory and the fulfilment of statutory duties is good.

### **The LEA's strategy for special educational needs**

120. In the previous inspection, the LEA's strategy for special educational needs was judged as unsatisfactory. The strategy is now highly satisfactory.

121. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs is based on a thorough and detailed audit of the current position. It is set out in a document which makes the LEA's commitment to inclusion clear and explains the beginnings of action to make it a reality. Local circumstances justify the LEA's emphasis on an incremental approach to win schools over to the principles of inclusion. The strategic documents, however, are not yet explicit enough in setting precise targets and costs.

122. At the time of the previous inspection, significant numbers of pupils were being educated outside the county. The numbers of pupils in the LEA's special schools continued to rise after the inspection, as did the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs. Mainstream schools believed that they could not meet the needs of their pupils by deploying their own resources. Since then, the LEA has enabled its own schools to meet the needs of pupils who would formerly have been placed outside the county. Several pilot projects to include children with special needs have been established to demonstrate good practice and build confidence in inclusion. The number of children in special schools has begun to fall.

123. In September 2001, the LEA introduced a new system to fund mainstream schools to meet the needs of pupils with moderate levels of difficulty. Resources to fund the provision required for individual pupils are available without the formality of statutory assessment, which is now required only for pupils with higher levels of need. The change has generally been welcomed by schools because it is less bureaucratic than the previous arrangement; it has increased the level of delegated resources and so given the schools more control of their use of resources. It has also led to a reduction in the number of statements maintained by the LEA.

### **Statutory obligations**

124. At the time of the previous inspection statutory obligations were not being met. The report criticised the LEA's statements of special educational needs and recommended that

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they should specify the required provision more precisely. The work is now good. The statements are specific, detailed, quantified, and written in plain language.

125. The first inspection found a high proportion of statements issued within statutory time limits, but there was then a deterioration in performance such that, by 2001/2, the service had become poor. The LEA has transformed the service and, in 2002/3, performance was very good indeed. The LEA's own work is speedier and, in collaboration with the primary care trusts, has ensured that very few assessments are delayed by other agencies

126. The LEA provides good information and guidance for parents. There is a parent partnership scheme. All parents are given satisfactory information about the scheme, as well as about their legal rights in the assessment process. Durham is a member of a regional partnership of LEAs which develops and disseminates good practice, as well as providing a resolution service for cases where parents and the authority are unable to agree.

### **School improvement**

127. In the previous inspection, this function was unsatisfactory. It is now highly satisfactory.

128. The services to support pupils with special needs are satisfactory. They work with teachers to develop their skills, as well as supporting individual pupils and contributing to training school staff. The educational psychology service increasingly provides effective consultancy to enable teachers to improve their strategies to meet children's needs. Psychologists also contribute usefully to training in schools.

129. Criteria for assessments of special educational needs are clear, and consistent with national policy. Delegated and centrally held resources are allocated according to criteria which accurately reflect need.

130. In the first inspection, the LEA was holding too great a proportion of resources for special educational needs centrally. It now holds much less. However, it still holds centrally the resources for statements in the primary aged group and this reduces flexibility in the schools.

### **Value for money**

131. The previous inspection found this unsatisfactory and recommended that the LEA should develop systems to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of services in terms of the attainment and progress of pupils. The current systems of evaluation do not yet take full account of pupils' progress but improvements have been made and the LEA is about to implement a system which will enable it to respond to the last inspection's recommendation in full. Value for money is now satisfactory.

132. Budget planning is generally good and budgets are not exceeded. Overall spending on special educational needs as a proportion of the local schools budget in 2002/3 was broadly in line with national levels.

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133. Allocation of resources to special schools is, as common with most schemes, largely determined by the number of places maintained by the LEA in each school. The LEA has wisely decided not to reduce the number of funded places in each special school strictly in line with falling rolls, so as to leave additional resources in the schools to develop outreach work and promote the LEA's inclusion policy. This is a sensible and pragmatic decision but the LEA does not yet have a system for identifying how much money is made available for the outreach work and so cannot assess in detail how effectively it is being used.

134. The LEA ensures that each governing body is informed about all the resources in its budget that can be used for special needs. It monitors the progress of statemented pupils, as well as those who are the subject of the new less formal arrangements, through a system of reviews. It does not, however, monitor how schools deploy their resources in support of children with special needs. As a result, it cannot tell in detail if the resources are being used effectively in order to raise standards.

***Recommendation***

Scrutinise schools' use of resources for special educational needs in order to ensure they are being used effectively to raise standards.
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## **Section 4: Promoting social inclusion**

### **Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion**

135. The previous inspection did not make an overall judgement on this work. It is highly satisfactory and no area within it is weak. Its strength derives from the priority attached to the matter by the council. This ensures that the education department's services make a sound contribution to the work. It also ensures that there is a consistent and strategically directed approach which draws together the contributions made by the district councils and by the other public bodies serving the county.

### **The strategy to promote social inclusion**

136. No judgement was made about the LEA's social inclusion strategy in the last inspection. That strategy is highly satisfactory. The LEA has been successful in attracting resources from a wide variety of funding streams, including education action zones, Sure Start, the single regeneration budget, the Children's Fund and the European Social Fund. Its initiatives are co-ordinated effectively through its strategic and local planning arrangements. The arrangements for collaboration are good. Councillors, officers and schools have a strong commitment to social inclusion and a shared view of what needs to be done.

137. The LEA's determination in this respect is reflected in its hierarchy of planning documents. The Best Value Performance and Community Plan sets out a strategy for regeneration which prioritises educational attainment and inclusion. The behaviour support plan is comprehensive and the Education Development Plan makes tackling underachievement and combating inequality a priority.

138. The structures the LEA has created to implement its social inclusion policies are complex but effective. There is a strategic partnership to deal with social inclusion in education, and there are locally based arrangements within it to ensure that the initiatives made through a wide variety of funding streams cohere at local level, and that the priorities properly reflect the needs of the area.

139. The outcome of this work is that the principles and priorities of the strategy are widely shared among the partners. This creates a shared view of what is important and a general agreement over what action should be taken to promote social inclusion.

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

140. In the previous inspection the LEA's effectiveness was good. It is now satisfactory. The LEA currently has a substantial surplus of places in the primary sector. This has worsened gradually, but steadily, over recent years as rolls have fallen. Significant numbers of surplus places have been removed but this has mainly been achieved through amalgamating schools and finding alternative uses for some accommodation. One small primary school has been closed. The LEA has had greater success in removing places in secondary schools and the position there is now sound.

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141. The LEA is currently developing a major programme of change to address what would otherwise become a very serious problem as primary rolls fall further. The first round of consultation with schools has begun. Significant numbers of school closures and reorganisations are included in the, as yet outline, programme. The extent of the changes now proposed is partly the result of insufficient action having been taken until now to deal with the known, developing difficulties. The availability of capital funding to effect changes has also been a significant limiting factor. If all the current proposals are implemented, or equivalent alternatives found, the position over the medium term will be satisfactorily secured. The LEA's first priority is necessarily the developing problems in the primary sector. However, it is rightly also looking beyond the next few years to the time when falling primary rolls begin to affect secondary schools. Leading councillors are taking an active part in moving the planning process forward and the removal of surplus places is a corporate priority.

142. The LEA is effective in forecasting pupil rolls. The authority liaises effectively with schools and other interested parties in the course of the work. It has long-established arrangements for consultation on the implications of the forecasts but there have been significant weaknesses in the information and analysis in the School Organisation Plans. These have impeded the ability of stakeholders to scrutinise and challenge the LEA's analysis. This is so even for primary and secondary school provision, with which the plans are mainly concerned. Their coverage of early years, SEN, post-16, and education otherwise than at school issues is significantly worse. The documents so far provided as part of the initial consultation on the major change programme are better, but they still fail to provide a full and clear justification for the LEA's ambitious proposals. However, the time for presenting very specific proposals for each local area has yet to come.

143. Useful work has been done in establishing the key principles to underpin the planning of school places and the associated building works. The LEA has developed a matrix methodology for assessing priorities which brings together, in a very helpful way, the key considerations of school capacity, building condition and suitability, and educational standards. Educational performance has become an important criterion in developing proposals for the reorganisation of existing schools.

#### ***Recommendation***

Ensure that school organisation planning is clear and detailed enough to enable stakeholders to scrutinise and challenge its analyses fully.

#### **Asset management**

144. The previous inspection did not cover this work. Asset management planning is very good. The LEA has met all the deadlines set by government for the submission of building condition, suitability, and capacity data. The quality of that data is satisfactory. Schools have confidence in the assessment processes involved, and its detailed findings have been discussed with them. Condition assessment reports have been designed to assist schools in their own planning and good back-up explanation and advice is provided for them. There are satisfactory arrangements for updating the various assessments of need.

145. Schools have been provided with excellent information on asset management. There are very good opportunities for them to be involved early in the development of policies and priorities. This includes both a working group with school representatives and more general consultation. The LEA has recently developed a matrix approach to identifying schools with the highest need for building work. It is highly effective in bringing together their needs for building capacity, condition, and suitability with needs related to improving educational standards and promoting social inclusion. The LEA makes a special contribution to asset management by identifying schools where need is so high that radical solutions, aimed at all types of need together, are required.

146. The LEA's current level of investment in its building stock is sufficient to meet existing levels of need for repair in a cost effective way and to prevent the development of a serious backlog. The capital funding available from other sources is supplemented by significant sums drawn from the revenue budget. The LEA's requirement for funds to meet suitability needs is well beyond the amount currently available. This is the case for the great majority of LEAs and the authority is currently exploring the development of a major private finance initiative scheme to increase the funds available. The planning and management of building projects is now good and involves schools fully. The LEA has a good record of ensuring that all the available capital funds are spent. It has taken effective steps to develop new ways of delivering building projects to ensure that full use is made of the increasing capital funding available.

### **Admissions**

147. At the time of the first inspection, the LEA's management of admissions was satisfactory. It is now highly so. The LEA has taken some actions in anticipation of the new statutory requirements. It has a long established Admissions Forum and there is effective liaison with other admissions authorities. The LEA's admissions criteria and home to school transport policies are closely linked. The provision of information and support for parents is effective overall. The written material is clear.

148. There is a common timetable for the primary to secondary transfer process and the LEA coordinates the process for all local schools so that multiple offers to the same child are avoided. Its administration of the secondary transfer process is good. Information provided to schools meets their needs and deadlines are met. The timescales for each stage of the main primary and secondary reception exercises meet at least minimum guideline standards. In some respects they meet best practice standards. Appeals are handled well. There is a good system to ensure that transfers between schools at times other than the main intake points are well managed. The placement of pupils following permanent exclusion is effective.

### **Provision of education for pupils who have no school place**

149. This function was satisfactory in the last inspection. It continues to be so and no fieldwork was carried out in the area.

**Attendance**

150. In the previous inspection, this was unsatisfactory. The report recommended the LEA to give greater strategic emphasis to attendance; to analyse data more effectively and to deploy resources according to need. It also recommended support for schools in setting and monitoring targets for improvement. The LEA has acted effectively on all of these issues. Support for attendance is now good.

151. The LEA's strategy identifies attendance as a key aspect of social inclusion. The strategy is set out in the behaviour support plan and up-dated annually. Partnership working is well embedded and the Travellers' education service has been particularly effective in working with schools and the local community to promote attendance.

152. Schools set targets for improvement in their regular meetings with their link inspectors, and guidance is provided to help them make improvements. The education welfare service is highly effective. It disseminates good practice and ensures that schools give attendance a high priority. It also monitors schools' performance against their targets and implements a robust policy on prosecution. Education welfare service resources are targeted according to a published formula. The service provides satisfactory value for money.

153. The support work is leading to improved attendance. Unauthorised absence in primary schools is stable at a low level and, in secondary schools it has improved significantly since 1997/8. Overall absence shows a broadly similar pattern. There has been steady improvement at primary level and a more rapid, sustained reduction from a higher base in the secondary sector. Attendance in that phase is now in line with the national average. This is a considerable achievement in a short time.

**Behaviour support**

154. In the previous inspection, the LEA's support for behaviour was highly satisfactory. It is now good.

155. The behaviour support service was well regarded by schools at the time of the last inspection and this remains the case. Schools are given comprehensive and well thought-out advice on behaviour management during visits by the support service. Service costs are planned and monitored, and there is a good anti-bullying policy in the LEA. The behaviour support plan is good. It is kept up to date, the number of permanent exclusions is falling, and the challenging but realistic targets set out in the behaviour support plan have been met. The plan is being implemented well. In addition, the service has good links with special schools for emotional and behavioural difficulties. By working with these schools to develop out-reach work, it is promoting inclusion.

156. Since the previous inspection, the establishment of a range of alternative curriculum projects has been an important development. These offer places to students in years 10 and 11 who are disaffected with school and at risk of exclusion. Students following these courses are educated full time, mostly, or entirely, off the school site, although they remain on roll and therefore the school is responsible for their education and welfare. The educational

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arrangements, which include access to accredited courses, are managed by officers who also supervise the young people's progress. The largest of the projects is known as, "Impact" and provides for 300 students.

157. These projects have played a large part in the sustained reduction in permanent exclusions and the improvement in attendance in Key Stage 4. Young people benefit from them.

158. Both primary and secondary schools are supported well by this service. The service has also developed effective multi-agency working through the local strategic partnership. The provision of outdoor pursuits work by the Police service in one district is an example.

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

159. In the previous inspection, this area was highly satisfactory. It remains so.

160. The LEA has succeeded in establishing an ethos of listening to children through its consultation on the children's services plan. This has helped to establish a safe context in which they can express their concerns. There are clear child protection procedures in place. The LEA records the identity of the teachers in schools with responsibility for child protection, and monitors their training. Whilst the uptake of courses over the last two years falls short of the highest standard, schools regard highly the support provided by the LEA.

161. The area child protection committee is effective. It keeps its policies and procedures under review and learns from situations where things have gone wrong. Every two years, it carries out an audit of child protection procedures in schools. Its preventative work is closely tied in to that of the seven local strategic partnerships in Durham, and involves a range of different agencies.

162. The LEA's health and safety procedures are comprehensive, comprehensible, and kept up to date.

### **Looked after children**

163. In the previous inspection, this was highly satisfactory. It is still so. No fieldwork was carried out.

### **Measures to combat racism**

164. This was not covered by the first inspection. It is satisfactory. Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but the latter require action. The LEA's framework of policy is good, but it has yet to be developed into a strategy for the implementation of change and schools, in this predominantly white area, do not attach enough priority to this aspect of their work.

165. Councillors and officers are committed to combating racism. A framework for policy development has been established. There is a set of corporate equalities policies including one for race. This has been developed into an education department race equality action plan with targets and timescales. The LEA has also produced a set of guidelines for

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reporting racial incidents in line with the recommendation of the report of the MacPherson inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It has comprehensive documentation to ensure that the right information is collected. A training programme has been set up to support these developments and the LEA is working with the local race equality council to develop its framework and practice further.

166. There are, however, weaknesses in the implementation of policy. Officers have analysed the effectiveness of the reporting arrangements. Reports of racist incidents were compared with records of exclusions for racist behaviour. The astute analysis found some of these exclusions had not been reported as racist incidents. Officers also found that only a third of schools have sent a teacher on any of the training courses.

167. Some information is not acted upon. The LEA analyses its data according to ethnic origin, in order to establish whether there are patterns of discrimination and disadvantage in, for example, achievement and exclusions. However, there is no evidence this information is used to develop procedures or practice.

***Recommendation***

Establish and implement a strategy to improve schools' procedures and practices in combating racism.
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## **Section 5: Corporate issues**

### **Introduction to corporate issues**

168. In summary, the corporate governance of the LEA is good. Community leadership, both of the schools and in collaboration with strategic partners, is strong. It provides a framework of clear policy direction in the county which is leading to improvements in the education service. The survey shows that schools judge the LEA's strategy significantly more favourably than do schools in most other authorities.

### **Corporate planning**

169. In the previous inspection, corporate planning was highly satisfactory. It has improved and is now good. Corporate planning has been strengthened by incorporating the council's corporate plan and its best value performance plan in a single document. Similarly, the education service combines the education development plan with the service's strategic plan and the top level operational planning in a single document, "Partners in Learning." The effect of this integration is to improve the coherence of the council's planning processes and to give them strong strategic direction at all levels.

170. Education is given a high priority. That is evident in the council's making improvement in Key Stage 4, one of its key corporate priorities in the coming year. It is also evident in the allocation of resources to that priority. Corporate planning continues to develop. The countywide strategic partnership has produced a draft strategic vision which is currently being consulted upon. That vision of the future again gives education high priority and this new level of strategy has the potential of further strengthening the council's community leadership by developing common goals for the seven district councils and the county council.

171. The relationship between education and regeneration is central to the council's direction. It is evident also in the priority attached to social inclusion. The education service itself has a longstanding concern with the issues that confront it in providing for small, scattered rural communities, some agricultural but many former mining villages, where the need for regeneration is particularly pressing. In the work which the LEA has done to set up a coherent set of initiatives aimed at tackling these matters, the strength of its strategic direction and attention to local issues is demonstrable.

172. At the time of the previous inspection, the implementation of corporate plans was highly satisfactory overall, but the report found monitoring and evaluation not to be strong. This part of the LEA's work has improved and is now good. The success of the service in implementing its Education Development Plan, with the exception of improving standards in Key Stage 4, is evidence of this. Improvement in evaluation is evident in the emphasis now being placed on the attainment of pupils in that key stage. Evaluation has been strengthened by the appointment of a senior officer in the education department, responsible, among other things, for the evaluation of the department's work in raising standards. The performance management system is reported upon in Section 1 above. Some weakness notwithstanding, the system in the education department, is more highly developed than in the authority as a

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whole because of the greater availability of measurable success criteria in education compared with other services.

### **Decision making**

173. Decision making was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It is now good. This improvement stems from the improvements made in the strategic development of the authority. The workings of the recently established Schools' Forum illustrate this. That forum has played a significant role in laying the foundations upon which the current budget has been built. It enabled the education department to build a consensus of schools in both the primary and secondary phases on the allocation of extra money to Key Stage 4. That achievement facilitated the timely decision made by the council on the education budget.

174. Brisk decision making is being further developed through increased delegation to chief officers. The chief education officer has recently been empowered to take a wider range of decisions in school improvement matters, for example when it is necessary to appoint new governors to a school causing concern.

### **The leadership provided by officers and elected members**

175. The leadership provided by councillors was highly satisfactory in the last inspection. That provided by officers was not judged. Both are now good. The relationships with schools of both officers and members are good. They are founded on close contact. For example, councillors have conducted some recent scrutiny enquiries in schools involved in the issues, and senior officers hold regular briefing meetings with headteachers and governors, most recently on matters of finance and school admissions.

176. The first inspection found relationships with schools to be enviable. They remain so and indeed, headteachers interviewed during this inspection reported that both communication and consultation have been much improved. For the most part, the leadership of officers and members has been successful in developing shared priorities with the schools, especially in the emphasis on school improvement. In this respect, primary school headteachers were rather more convinced the priorities were right than were secondary school headteachers. The weakness here is in providing a vision to guide the schools and other providers in developing work in Key Stage 4 and post-16.

177. Following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, councillors have increased the emphasis they place on their community leadership of the schools, voluntary organisations and statutory bodies. They are further developing it through a programme of training. In this programme, as in other matters, the councillors have been well advised by officers. The advice they are given was not inspected in the first inspection. It is now good. Councillors spoken to held a high opinion of it, both in their role as councillors, and when they act as chairs of schools' governing bodies.

### **Collaboration**

178. This aspect of the LEA's work was highly satisfactory in the last inspection. It is now good. The task of working in partnership with external bodies is a complex one in this

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county which comprises so many small, and distinct communities. The work through the local strategic partnerships in each of the seven districts is strong. The county council supports it energetically. Durham's officers and councillors are represented on all of the partnerships. Their work with them is making a contribution to school improvement and the primary school headteachers interviewed saw the partnerships as providing improved liaison with those locally responsible for both health and housing. Secondary schools were a little more sceptical. The collaboration with the districts is most advanced in those districts which have neighbourhood renewal funding, some of which is directed at education. In one, the partnership is discussing the future pattern of sixth form provision in the context of the regeneration of the area.

179. As well as developing strategy, the county's overall strategic partnership has a sub-partnership dealing specifically with education. This is enabling co-ordinated approaches by, for example, involving the county's Early Years and Childcare Partnership with the district councils.

180. The LEA's other partners were invited to comment on their collaborations with the LEA. The health authorities, the police and the Learning and Skills Council, commented positively on the effectiveness of their relationship with the LEA. Relations with the Anglican diocese are weaker than those with other partners. The education department works well with other departments of the council.

## **Appendix 1: Recommendations**

### **Recommendations to improve the strategy for school improvement**

Improve the Key Stage 4 strategy by setting out the weaknesses that schools should deal with and by placing greater emphasis on teaching and learning.

Improve the evaluation of services by identifying and using measurable indicators of success more consistently.

### **Recommendations to make school improvement more effective**

Ensure that monitoring and challenge, including target setting and schools' self-evaluation are used to promote better school development planning, particularly in Key Stage 4.

Improve strategic and operational planning for ICT by making more use of performance indicators to measure success in implementing the plans.

Strengthen collaboration between the corporate ICT service and the education department in order to improve the planning and provision of support for schools.

Improve support for Key Stage 3 by placing greater emphasis on the cross-curricular development of the strategy and on raising boys' attainment.

Improve support for gifted and talented pupils in secondary schools in order to raise attainment in Key Stage 4.

Develop and implement, in collaboration with all partners, a coherent and practical strategy to improve participation and attainment for all young people between 14 and 19.

### **Recommendation to improve special educational needs provision**

Scrutinise schools' use of resources for special educational needs in order to ensure they are being used effectively to raise standards.

### **Recommendations to improve social inclusion**

Ensure that school organisation planning is clear and detailed enough to enable stakeholders to scrutinise and challenge its analyses fully.

Establish and implement a strategy to improve schools' procedures and practices in combating racism.

## Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

Name of LEA :	Durham
LEA number	
Name of Inspector:	David Halligan
Date of Inspection:	May 2003

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

14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	3	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	2	
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	3	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value		3
19	Support to school governors		2
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	3	
20a	Financial services		2
20b	Human resources		3
20c	Property services		4
20d	Services for ICT in school administration		4
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	2	
20f	Grounds maintenance	2	
20g	Catering	4	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	2	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	3	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	3	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	3	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	3	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	3	



<b>SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	3	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
<b>SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION</b>			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	3	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	4	
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	1	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place		4
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	2	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	2	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	3	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care		3
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	4	
<b>SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES</b>			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	2	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	2	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	2	

46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	2	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	2	
<b>OVERALL JUDGEMENTS</b>			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	

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

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