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IN EDUCATION

INSPECTION OF DURHAM LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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INTRODUCTION

This inspection 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*¹, which focuses on the effectiveness of Local Education Authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. In addition to the standard themes, the inspection covered support for special educational needs; support for improving the teaching of design and technology and modern foreign languages; and support to improve the attendance of pupils.

The inspection was in two stages. An initial review established a picture of the LEA's context, the performance of its schools, its strategy and the management of services. The initial review was based on data provided by the LEA, school inspection and audit reports, LEA documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views of aspects of the LEA's work was sent to 110 schools. The response rate was 86 per cent.

The second stage of the inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 16 primary schools, two special schools, and eight secondary schools. In addition brief visits were made to a hospital school, environmental education centres and arts centres. The purpose of the visits was to discover the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

This report draws on material from the initial review, from the school survey and from the visits, together with evidence relevant to the themes drawn from recent HMI visits to Durham schools.

¹ *LEA support for School Improvement: A Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, London, OFSTED, 1999.

COMMENTARY

This is a well managed Local Education Authority (LEA). As an organisation, it has more strengths than weaknesses, and both the school survey and the visits to 26 schools confirm that it is popular and has positive relationships with its schools. The evidence of its effect on the performance of schools and pupils is, however, more equivocal. Up to the age of 11, pupils in Durham achieve standards which are in line with national averages. Thereafter, they do less well and, by the age of 16, only 36 per cent of pupils gain 5 A*~C grades at GCSE, compared to 46 per cent nationally. Nevertheless, out of 311 schools, there are no schools in County Durham requiring special measures and only two identified as having serious weaknesses. This is an impressive record.

Durham is a large county, with a stable population of about half a million, more than three quarters of whom live in small towns and villages. It has some areas of considerable deprivation, owing to the decline of the mining industry. The LEA therefore serves a relatively homogeneous population and in some respects serves it well. It has, first of all, the right priorities. Those set out in the Education Development Plan (EDP) are based on a sound analysis of local needs and rightly focus on the issue of improving performance in secondary schools. The visits undertaken for the inspection provided evidence of effective, detailed support in the majority of schools visited, but not of a consistent advance assisted by the LEA.

The LEA meets its statutory duties and carries out some key tasks well. Its services to support pupils and school management are of good quality and well managed. Support for improving literacy is well structured, deployed efficiently in relation to needs, and effectively in raising standards. The provision of performance data to support schools in setting targets is particularly comprehensive. There are, however, weaknesses. The support provided by link and subject inspectors is too variable in terms of quality and effectiveness. It is not well monitored or evaluated and in some areas provides universal support for modest returns. Services to support improvements in attendance and school buildings are not effective.

Durham's expenditure on services is, in most instances, high for a county LEA, and this, combined with below-average delegation of funds to schools, constrains the resources available to the schools. Most services are effective and provide satisfactory or good value for money and we found little evidence that the schools wanted fundamental change in this balance (though Fair Funding will entail a higher level of delegation). However, centrally retained spending is now only justifiable where resources are targeted at areas of greatest need. In Durham, monitoring and evaluation are not strengths, and too much of the LEA's support is all-embracing, rather than focused.

Overall, then, the LEA performs soundly and, in some respects, well. The quality of its leadership and management is reflected in its orderliness and consistency as an organisation but its impact in the schools, to date, is mixed. We question, therefore, whether it has the right balance between "challenge" and "support" which will promote school autonomy and whether the cost of the support provided for school improvement is reflected in improvements in pupil attainment, particularly in secondary schools. The LEA enjoys enviable relationships with its

schools: it has the capacity to build upon this good will in order to improve in those areas where its performance is currently too variable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A In order to ensure that the work of the Inspection and Advisory Service is better focused, the LEA should:

- (I) review the deployment of link and subject inspectors to ensure that support is targeted at schools and subjects with particular needs;**
- (ii) make the costs of the Inspection and Advisory Services clear to schools so that they can make a more reliable evaluation of whether the support provides value for money and can contribute to an informed consultation on the different organisational options which are available.**

B In order to improve the accountability of the Inspection and Advisory Service and further support schools causing concern, the LEA should:

- (I) share the Notes of Visit of link inspectors with the schools;**
- (ii) consult with schools specifically on its strategy for identifying and intervening in schools causing concern, clearly identifying the category into which schools fall;**
- (iii) monitor and evaluate the work of link and subject inspectors to ensure a consistent service and impact on school improvement.**

C In order to improve services to pupils with special educational needs, the LEA should:

- (i) ensure that provision to meet pupils' special educational needs is specified, detailed and quantified in statements;**
- (ii) develop systems to monitor and evaluate service quality and effectiveness related to the overall attainment and progress of pupils;**

D In order to improve the standards at Key Stage 3, the LEA should:

- (i) make the focus of the current projects more explicit, clearly target them at identified areas of weakness, and monitor improvement against spending;**
- (ii) provide strategic leadership in devising a consistent approach to the curriculum needs of pupils transferring between primary and secondary schools.**

E In order to improve pupil attendance, particularly in secondary schools, the LEA should:

- (i) give a higher strategic emphasis to improving pupil attendance in specific secondary schools and in the LEA's related initiatives;**
- (ii) analyse attendance and absence levels in more detail, deploy staff accordingly and establish consistent levels of response and intervention;**
- (iii) support schools in setting detailed and specific targets to improve attendance and monitor action to support such improvements.**

F In order to improve the quality of teaching, the LEA should:

- (i) provide guidance on the respective roles of the link/subject inspectors and the school in the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching;**
- (ii) plan a training programme for teachers and governors more focused on LEA priorities and schools' needs, and provide more school-based training.**

G In order to support school improvement by improving value for money, the LEA should:

- (i) set out the costs of services more clearly for schools so that they can make informed choices about which services to purchase, particularly in relation to the Inspection and Advisory Service, the Area Learning Support Service and the School Governor Support Service;**
- (ii) set out its intentions for small schools and sixth forms in its School Organisation Plan.**

SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT OF THE LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

Socio-economic context

1. County Durham is the largest local education authority (LEA) in north-east England. It is primarily a rural county of about 860 square miles bordered by the conurbation's of Tyneside and Wearside to the north and Teesside to the south. The number of people living in the County at present is about 500,000. Following local government re-organisation in 1997, when Darlington became a separate unitary authority, Durham City has become the County's largest town, with a population of 38,000. Over 80 per cent of the County is rural and more than three quarters of its population live in small towns and villages. The population of the County is declining and its sparsity in rural areas influences school size and transport arrangements.

2. County Durham has levels of male and youth unemployment, lone parenthood and chronic illness which are higher than 90 per cent of other county authorities. The lack of home and car ownership and the proportion of adults without higher education qualifications are similarly high. The eligibility of pupils for free school meals is broadly in line with the average of its statistical neighbours and with national figures. In primary schools it is 24.9 per cent (national 22.8 per cent), in secondary schools it is 18.8 per cent (national 18.2 per cent).

Characteristics of pupil population

3. In January 1999 there were 1,280 pupils in nursery schools, 4,226 in nursery classes, 42,834 in primary schools, 32,123 in secondary schools and 1,014 in special schools. Numbers entering reception classes and school rolls will continue to fall for the foreseeable future.

4. There are 3,168 (4.2 per cent) pupils with statements of special educational need: 1,928 are placed in mainstream schools, 1,010 are educated in the County's special schools and a further 230 are educated in independent schools or out-county special schools.

5. There is a very low proportion (0.7 per cent) of pupils from ethnic minorities compared to the national average of 9.7 per cent.

The organisation of schools

6. At September 1998 the composition of schools was:

Nursery	15	
Infant	37	(20 with nursery units)
Junior	33	
Primary	179	(62 with nursery units)
Secondary Comprehensive	36	(17 with sixth forms)
Special	11	
TOTAL	311	

There are no grant-maintained schools.

7. There is a common admissions policy and all pupils in County Durham aged four on 31 August can gain a place in mainstream primary education. In comparison with other counties the LEA provides the highest percentage of LEA nursery places for pupils aged three. Eighty seven per cent of three year olds attended either a nursery school or unit.

8. Twenty three per cent of the 1998 Year 11 cohort entered sixth forms in their own schools. The remaining Year 11 pupils who continued in education attended one of six colleges or Durham Sixth Form Centre. There are sixth forms in 17 of the County's 36 secondary comprehensive schools. Ten of them have fewer than 150 students, and four of these have fewer than 90 students. Such small sixth forms are likely to be uneconomic and not viable.

9. Education otherwise than at schools is provided by the Behaviour Support Service which operates one Pupil Referral Unit, teams of peripatetic staff who support pupils excluded from school and the Home and Hospital Support Service for pupils who are pregnant or ill. There is also a Traveller Education Service operating mainly within schools.

Resources available to the LEA (Appendix 1)

10. Durham County Council has consistently spent above the Standard Spending Assessment on education (see Table 1). The provisional figures for 1999/2000 show a settlement above inflation and expenditure above the Standard Spending Assessment will continue.

11. The LEA has been successful in securing Standards Fund resources matched by funds from the education budget. Although the education service in general terms has been protected in previous years of budget stringency, a policy of ensuring that school budgets are maintained has meant that the Education Department has had to identify budget savings on an annual basis.

12. Both the 88 per cent average level of delegation of resources to schools and the average per pupil funding (delegated budgets only) (see Table 2) are lower than the average for County and Metropolitan areas. Levels of delegation of resources to primary, secondary and special schools vary (see Table 3). The General Schools Budget (GSB) indicating amounts of funding per pupil is given in Table 4.

The structure of the LEA and the Education Department

13. The County Council is served by a Policy and Resources Committee and five service committees, one of which is the Education Committee. The Education Committee has 35 elected members, 12 co-opted members and one observer. It meets bi-monthly. It has two sub-committees. The Policy and Operations Sub-Committee meets monthly and the Monitoring and Review Sub-Committee meets termly.

14. The Education Department is structured in two groups based on an internal commissioning-provider relationship. The Core and Strategic Services Group is responsible for the LEA's strategic role of planning and improving standards. It commissions all other services from the corresponding Education Services Group which includes all directly delivered services.

SECTION 2: THE PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOLS

15. The following summary refers to all maintained schools in Durham LEA and includes results for 1998. The data used in this section is illustrative. Further details on the performance of Durham LEA schools are given in Appendix 2.

16. ***The attainment of pupils on entry to infant and primary schools in Durham is judged by inspectors to be broadly in line with national norms.***

17. ***Attainment is in line with national averages in primary schools.***

- in Key Stages 1 and 2 teacher assessments and end of Key Stage tests attainment is generally in line with national and statistical neighbours' averages;
- pupils achieved above national averages in the writing tests at Key Stage 1 and the mathematics tests at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

18. ***Attainment in secondary schools is lower than in the statistical neighbours or nationally.***

- attainment in mathematics and science in Key Stage 3 tests is broadly in line with that of the LEA's statistical neighbours and with national averages, but attainment in English is below that found nationally;
- the GCSE results show the proportion of pupils gaining 1+ A*~G grade, 5+ A~G grades and overall average points score to be in line with the LEA's statistical neighbours, but below national averages. The percentage of pupils who achieve 5+ A*~ C grades is below the national and statistical neighbours' averages.

19. ***Post 16 attainment is in line with national averages.***

- the A level average point score per pupil (17.7 points) for those taking two or more examinations is in line with those of the LEA's statistical neighbours (17.6 points) and national averages (17.5 points).

20. ***Levels of attainment vary, but have shown an upward trend.***

- since 1996 levels of attainment have risen in all core subjects at Key Stages 1 and 2
- at Key Stage 3 there have been improvements in English and mathematics, but a decline in science;
- the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A*~ C grades has varied in the past three years from 36.4 per cent (1996) to 37.1 per cent (1997) and 36.2 per cent (1998), but other measures show an overall upward trend;

- of the 36 secondary schools, 13 have GCSE average points scores which exceed the national average, eight are broadly in line with the national average and 11 below it. Four schools have average point scores well below the national average; in all of these the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals exceeds the national average;
- the average points score for students taking two or more A-levels improved over the same period.

21. *Rates of improvement from 1996 to 1998 are better in primary schools than in secondary schools.*

- rates of improvement in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 1 have been above those of the LEA's statistical neighbours and national rates;
- the end of Key Stage 2 rates of improvement have been variable, being equal or better in English and mathematics than that achieved by the statistical neighbours, but lower than the national improvement, and better than both in science;
- in English and mathematics the percentage of pupils achieving level 5+ at the end of Key Stage 3, improved less than the statistical neighbours' and national averages. In science it fell by more than the fall for the statistical neighbours; the national average increased slightly over this three year period;
- the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ At-C grades fell against an increase in the national and statistical neighbours' averages. The schools' average GCSE points score over the same period improved by a greater amount than that of the LEA's statistical neighbours, but by an amount less than the national figure.

22. *The data from OFS TED inspections confirm that attainment in primary schools is in line with national norms but below national norms in secondary schools.*

- standards of attainment in primary schools are judged to be in line with those found nationally and with statistical neighbours, whilst those in secondary schools are below both comparators.
- the quality of education in primary schools is judged to be better than national figures, whilst secondary schools are judged to be below both national and statistical neighbours' figures. The climate in primary schools is judged to be similar to that found nationally and in comparable LEAs, whilst that in secondary schools is worse. In terms of management and efficiency, primary schools are judged favourably compared with the national picture; in this aspect, however, the LEA's secondary schools compare less favourably.
- data from five secondary schools which have been inspected in the second cycle of inspection shows that two have made satisfactory progress; two have made good progress and the remaining one has made very good progress since their last inspection.

23. *Attendance in primary schools is in line with the statistical neighbours and national figures. In secondary schools, the overall rate of attendance is below the national figure and that of the statistical neighbours. The rate of permanent exclusions from primary and secondary schools is in line with statistical neighbours' and national averages.*

SECTION 3 : LEA STRATEGY

The LEA has a clear and corporate strategic approach to planning. Its Education Development Plan sets relevant priorities but remains weak in areas of attendance, special educational needs and monitoring and evaluation. The LEA takes reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory duties. The funding of schools has remained a consistent priority of Members. Schools lack knowledge of the costs of some central support services.

24. Durham County Council sets out its mission, aims and objectives in a three year corporate plan which comes to an end in March 1999. Its mission is “to make County Durham the best place in which to live, work and bring up a family”. To achieve this it sets out eight aims and 20 objectives, two of which specifically refer to education services:

- to seek to ensure that all parents so wishing have access to pre-school education for their children;
- to promote higher standards of educational achievement.

Role, planning and priorities for school improvement

25. The Members of the Education Committee fulfil their role in setting the policies and priorities of the LEA within the framework of central government and Council objectives. To this end, the LEA produced its own Development Plan for 1997-2000 entitled “Partners in Learning” which sets out its vision, aims and objectives. The Development Plan was superseded by the Strategic Plan for 1998-2001 which re-emphasised previous objectives and set out 16 priorities.

Education Development Plan

26. The LEA's planning process has been further enhanced and focused on school improvement by its Education Development Plan. The plan reflects the LEA's context and includes agreed targets for pupil attainment in each school. The plan sets out eight priorities for school improvement:

- 1 Literacy
- 2 Numeracy
- 3 Key Stage 3 performance
- 4 Key Stage 4 performance
- 5 Leadership and management of schools
- 6 Early years provision
- 7 Information and communication technology
- 8 Monitoring, challenge and support.

27. These priorities are soundly based upon evidence in the LEA profile and a thorough statistical audit and analysis of pupil performance which identifies strengths and weaknesses. The Plan sets out targets for pupil attainment which have been agreed with schools and the

Department for Education and Employment. Weaknesses specific to County Durham have been clearly identified in the priorities 3, 4 and 5: to improve performance at Key Stages 3 and 4 and to improve leadership and management in schools. A related weakness in pupil attendance at secondary schools receives insufficient attention. All schools visited were aware of, and approved of, the LEA's priorities, ten strongly so. Schools perceived the LEA's priorities to be in line with national priorities.

28. The Plan has been subject to full consultation but this has, in the main, evoked little response from schools. Eighteen of the schools visited described consultation procedures as "full" or "good" but eight schools described them as "limited". The main criticisms were too much paper and not enough time to consider it. This criticism applies specifically to the draft Education Development Plan which runs to 116 pages. Only page 113 deals with provisional financial details. This coincided with the distribution of the Fair Funding consultation document, containing 111 pages. Unsurprisingly, headteachers of schools visited remain unclear about the financial implications of both documents and are seeking one year's breathing space before making informed choices about increased delegation.

Strategy for special educational needs

29. The Development Plan for 1997-2000 has a stated aim to reduce the numbers of pupils with statements by September 2001. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is one of the LEA's stated priorities in its Strategic Plan for 1998-2001. This aim is included in the Education Development Plan. Despite a comprehensive and attractive newsletter issued in March 1998, one third of the schools visited had no knowledge of LEA plans to educate more children with SEN in mainstream schools. Of those that did know, the vast majority knew only of the statement in principle and lacked knowledge of any implementation strategies for reducing pupil numbers in special schools. Indeed, pupil numbers in special schools and the number of pupils with statements are increasing.

30. The LEA has made good progress in reorganising some of its special schools and has increased the number of mainstream schools with resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs. However, it does not have a realistic strategy to reduce significantly pupil numbers in special schools or the number of pupils with statements. Recent proposals to delegate part of the funding of SEN support to primary schools have met with opposition.

Statutory duties

31. An analysis of the LEA's functions shows that it has taken reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory duties in relation to schools and pupils and to ensure that schools are aware of, and comply with, their responsibilities. This analysis was confirmed by visits to each of the 26 schools. With reference to guidelines on arrangements for the protection of children (Working Together 1991 437) the LEA does not know which staff in which schools have received appropriate training. In two of the schools visited staff had not received training. Once this was brought to its attention, the LEA took steps to rectify the situation.

Funding

32. Much work has already been done to prepare for further delegation under 'Fair Funding'. A consultation document has been sent to schools giving an exposition of those service budgets which are to be delegated from April 1999. The size of each budget is shown, as are the various mechanisms for distributing the budget to schools. In some cases there is also a school by school model allocation to clarify to headteachers and governors exactly how much would be delegated. All Unit managers (including those whose budgets will not be delegated until April 2000) are currently devising service level agreements with headteachers. These will enable schools to compare the costs of each service with the funds delegated to them.

33. At present there is a general lack of financial awareness in schools about those centrally held services due for delegation in April 2000. School managers were generally very satisfied with the services provided by the LEA. However, only one headteacher had any notion of the costs of any of the centrally provided services. Schools, therefore, are unable to make sound judgements on the value for money they are getting from these services.

34. The costs of many services examined in Durham, and their Strategic Management and School Improvement costs, are high compared with a group of 34 other County and Metropolitan LEAs using the Audit Commission's data and methodology. The next round of Fair Funding will mean that a considerable amount of these centrally held funds will be delegated to schools.

35. The County Council and the Education Department have effective mechanisms for establishing and funding priorities. The corporate management team meets regularly to establish priorities and agree on the distribution of resources. Chief officers are required to report to each other at regular intervals to establish the effectiveness of their service in the context of the resources they have been allocated.

36. The LEA identifies priorities through regular meetings of the senior management team, which includes representatives of all the major operational areas. The head of the LEA financial section is also a member of the senior management team and is able to provide an overview of resource needs compared to availability. There is general satisfaction with the funding approach adopted by the LEA. Schools appreciate the fact that funding has been above the Standard Spending Assessment for some time, and there were no consistent complaints about funding policies.

37. Five out of eight secondary headteachers said they welcomed the Fair Funding proposals, feeling that they would give them greater insights into some centrally held budgets and enable them to exercise more choice. None of the primary headteachers expressed these views.

38. Most service units examined had procedures in place to ensure they were efficient and effective. However, although development plans were clear, they were not costed.

39. The formula elements in the scheme for local management of schools are kept under constant review to ensure priorities are funded. School budgets are well presented and, where appropriate, the LEA makes its priorities explicit by illustrating for each school how much has been delegated to fund each priority. Examples are the Key Stage 3 development in secondary schools and non-contact time in primary school. Each school is required to produce a plan to demonstrate how it proposes to use the money. The LEA and schools have developed agreed, flexible approaches to enable schools to deliver strategic objectives. This development illustrates a good partnership arrangement between the LEA and its schools.

School places and admissions

40. In 1998, the District Auditor reported favourably on the management of school places and admissions. The LEA has almost achieved its stated objective of reducing surplus places to 10 per cent, although Durham has 55 primary and six secondary schools with at least 25 per cent of places unfilled.

41. The rural nature of many parts of the County militates against surplus place removal. The LEA estimates that £11 million is used to support small rural schools. Each small primary school is assessed as a matter of policy for viability/potential closure when circumstances permit, for example, when the headteacher post becomes vacant. Those small primaries visited did not feel threatened, but neither did they know with any certainty the long term future of the establishment. However, decisions about closure also have to be weighed against any estimated increase which may be incurred to the home to school transport budget, which currently stands at £5.1 million.

42. The LEA is developing its approach to the planning of school places in line with new legislation. It has data on the capacity of the schools and has identified schools with over-capacity. However, whilst the action plan of the Policy and Planning Unit does include a set of activities to monitor the situation it does not include any activities to indicate that a strategic approach has been taken to the issue of those schools with high levels of under capacity. Where admissions or surplus places are issues, two secondary and five primary schools spoke positively about the support provided by the LEA. This took various forms; for example, presenting complex issues to governors or handling difficulties over infant admissions, which would otherwise prejudice the Key Stage 1 class size pledge.

43. The LEA has a system for recording and tracking all pupils not in school. Schools are provided with relevant information about the exclusion procedures and the LEA has clear policies and procedures to deal with the other categories of education otherwise than at school.

Liaison

44. The liaison activities are well organised and form a solid basis for contributing towards the LEA's overall objective of promoting higher standards of educational achievement. Consultation with other services and agencies is regular and effective.

45. The LEA maintains links with a wide range of agencies, and particularly with the careers service, the constabulary, social services, the Training and Enterprise Council and Durham Education and Business Partnership. A key aspect of liaison is the County Durham Partnership Scheme For Young People, a project funded by the single regeneration budget to provide an integrated, multi-agency programme to improve levels of educational achievement for young people aged 7 - 16 in targeted areas of high economic and social deprivation.

46. The social services department has been a major partner in the Investors in Children policy, an integrated approach towards the provision of services for children which incorporates statutory requirements for a Service Plan and attempts to combat negative views of young people.

47. The management of the Early Years and Child Care Strategy draws on contributions from 23 members representing the voluntary, private and maintained sectors. A development plan has been drawn up with the aim of ensuring that pre-school provision is available for all children whose parents wish them to receive it. The strategy is subject to a sixth monthly monitoring and annual review process. It is supported by a detailed statistical analysis of local need and consumer opinions.

48. There are at least ten other multi-agency initiatives in preparation, and the Directory of Agencies and Initiatives lists 57 different projects.

SECTION 4: THE MANAGEMENT OF LEA SERVICES

The management of LEA services has more strengths than weaknesses. Generally services have analysed the needs of schools and ensured that relevant statutory duties are met. Services are, on the whole, well managed, expert and clearly planned in relation to overall priorities. The monitoring and evaluation of services are weaker and insufficiently linked to school improvement. Specific weaknesses exist and have been identified in each service.

INSPECTION AND ADVISORY SERVICE AND CURRICULUM AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

49. The service is divided into two arms - Inspection and Advisory Service and Curriculum and Professional Development Service. The Inspection and Advisory Service is responsible for the monitoring and maintenance of standards and effectiveness of schools. This is conducted through the attachment of link inspectors to schools and the work of phase and subject inspectors. The Curriculum and Professional Development Service organises the central in-service training programme, provides in-school support from curriculum support teachers and includes the music service, the Curriculum ICT service and the Management Development Centre. The combined service is headed by the Chief Inspector who is the Head of Education Standards and whose responsibilities include monitoring the effectiveness of LEA services.

50. As most of the work of this service will be directed to implementing the requirements of the Education Development Plan, with the exception of numeracy, most of the service development plan duplicates the Education Development Plan. This has resulted in a clearer set of objectives than in the previous year's plan and has helped to establish a necessary link between the Educational Development Plan and the main work of the service. Nevertheless insufficient consideration has been given to the appropriate content and purpose of the service development plan and its relationship to the Education Development Plan. For instance, numeracy is omitted from the service development plan although other national priorities are included. For the work of the Inspection and Advisory service which falls outside the parameters of the Education Development Plan and for changes in the service resulting from the implementation of Fair Funding and other national priorities, there is no strategy which details the resources and responsibilities allocated to the tasks.

51. Schools demonstrate a considerable commitment to the principle of the LEA maintaining a large and extensive inspection and advisory service. Nevertheless, the service depends on a high percentage of centrally retained funding, six per cent of which is met from external sources of income. The main source of Curriculum and Professional Development Funding is via Standards Fund Grant. During 1998/99 the LEA devolved 67 per cent of the School Effectiveness Grant to schools. The LEA offers Service Level Agreements covering teacher training, governor training and school management information training. School buy-backs equated to 87 per cent of the devolved resources in 1998/99. Three levels of support are available and all schools have subscribed at some level to the service. Buy back to the highest level is made by 98.8 per cent of primary schools and three secondary schools; about 70 per cent of secondary schools and one per cent of primary schools purchase at the standard level

and the remaining schools purchase at a basic level.

52. The details of the costs of the service, in particular for the Inspection and Advisory Service, are not well known or understood by the schools. While the support is generally valued, the schools are not in a position to make informed judgements about whether the current arrangements are proving effective or whether they provide value for money. Similarly, the schools do not have sufficient information to examine the relative merits of other organisational options. In the consultation for Fair Funding arrangements schools are rightly beginning to seek further information about costs and the deployment of resources about which they can make informed choices.

53. These are large services: all subjects and several aspects of the curriculum are well-covered by specialists. The Inspection and Advisory Service is staffed by 30 Inspectors who also hold responsibility for subjects and/or phases, and who are divided into phase and area teams. Some inspectors are also responsible for managing major initiatives such as the National Literacy Strategy, the National Numeracy Project and the strategy for the development of ICT. This leads to unevenness in inspectors' workloads. The Curriculum and Professional Development Service is staffed by 52 members. It has a policy of seconding teachers for one or two years from posts in schools to ensure that the service maintains staff as Curriculum Support Teachers who have recent and relevant classroom experience and who have credibility with schools

54. The schools are entitled to, and receive, high levels of support. In the schools visited, entitlements and service level agreements were always fulfilled. Annually, all schools receive from the link inspector 1.5 days in monitoring visits, 0.5 day for analysis of data and target setting, one day for self review and 0.5 day for headteacher appraisal, despite this scheme only operating in one third of the schools visited. Secondary schools receive 15 half day equivalent specialist visits per year to subject departments and the primary schools receive a specialist phase visit of one day every two years. These standard entitlements are too high to represent support in inverse proportion to success as envisaged in the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations to which LEA's must have regard from April 1999.

55. When OFSTED or the LEA identify schools as having significant weaknesses or causing concern, additional time is allocated. However, because the identification of schools causing concern is not yet shared with the schools themselves, it is difficult to distinguish the additional support from their usual entitlement. This leads to a lack of clarity about the purpose of such support.

56. Although the role of the link and subject inspector is clearly specified, the allocation of time does not reflect sufficiently the size or effectiveness of the school, and the deployment is not flexible enough to focus on the school's individual needs. For instance, in one secondary school subject support provided a check on subject departments prior to the OFSTED inspection, but there has been insufficient follow-up since. Specific weaknesses in subject departments in secondary schools are not always addressed through the existing deployment of staff time. In contrast, in the most effective schools, the allocation is greater than the schools

require.

57 Feedback from link inspector monitoring visits is not presented to schools in writing and schools do not always know the findings or how to act upon them. In monitoring visits link inspectors follow up on main points for action from inspection reports and this follow-up is recorded briefly on a proforma and stored on the LEA database. At the time of the inspection these proformas are not shared with schools although the LEA is consulting schools on this issue. The proformas do not include sufficient details of the findings of the visits or the action which schools are expected to take and would not consistently provide the necessary evidence for intervention in schools causing concern. The potential of the database to identify good practice and aspects for improvement is much greater than is currently realised. Development will depend on clearer recording of the findings of visits and agreed arrangements for discussing the findings with schools.

58. Support provided by the Curriculum and Professional Development Service is deployed in a way which is responsive to schools' needs and is more effective in supporting improvement. Schools are asked to submit an annual return detailing the provision of support and training which is required. Contracts are negotiated with each school to specify the work of curriculum support teachers. The service deploys its support so that there is a realistic opportunity for sustainable improvement and advises schools to allocate at least nine hours for each contract.

59. Schools are insufficiently involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the Inspection and Advisory Service. A system of measuring effectiveness which takes into account costs, challenge, comparison and competition with other services which are locally available has still to be developed although the need to monitor the impact of the service in addition to reviewing quality has recently been recognised. Monitoring has not yet been sufficiently effective to tackle the variation in the quality and support provided by link and subject inspectors. However, in-service training courses and the work of the curriculum support teachers are regularly evaluated by schools and the work of the Curriculum and Professional Development Service, including the central training programme, has recently been evaluated by an external consultant.

OTHER SERVICES WHICH PROMOTE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

60. The quality of services which promote access and achievement is generally good. They are well managed and distributed according to need. They are weak in evaluating their own effectiveness in relation to their impact on improving pupils' attainment and progress. The detail of provision in statements of special educational need is unsatisfactory.

61. **The Educational Psychology Service's** time is allocated as an entitlement to each school through a formula based on schools' needs. The net cost per pupil of the Educational Psychology Service is similar to other county councils but when the Portage Service is taken into account the unit cost is higher.

62. **The SEN Placement and Provision Service Unit** is responsible for determining and issuing the outcomes of statutory assessment and statutory annual reviews, including statements of special educational need, under the policy direction of the Education Committee.

The unit is temporarily managed by the Principal Educational Psychologist. A high percentage of statements are issued within the advisory time limit and there are few tribunals. The quality of statements seen in six schools visited was unsatisfactory. Statements were not specific, detailed or quantified in terms of the provision necessary to meet the pupils' special educational needs.

63. **The Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENSS)** consists of a range of specialist support services to schools, each of which has a manager responsible to the overall Head of SENSS. The service has a development plan, linked to the EDP, indicating the intention to develop a framework for self-monitoring and evaluation of service quality but developments are at an early stage.

64. **The Area Learning Support Service** is part of SENSS and supported 849 pupils with statements in 1997/8 and approximately 500 pupils referred by schools for assessment at Stage 3 in mainstream primary schools. Eighty-three per cent of schools received advisory or direct support in 1997/8. The service employs 99 teachers and 175 support assistants. The cost of the support to pupils with statements in the primary phase is £4.7 million and is almost twice the average for county councils. A small proportion of the funds (£642,000) which pay for support to pupils at Stage 3 was offered as a delegated item through Fair Funding arrangements for 1999/2000 but primary schools opposed delegation, preferring the LEA to retain the funds and provide the service. The central retention of such a large service conflicts with the LEA's stated principle of empowering schools.

65. There is no overall monitoring and evaluation of the progress and attainment of pupils in relation to the level of support received from the Area Learning Support Service. Similarly, schools are not in a position to judge the value for money provided by the service because service costs are unclear.

66. **The Behaviour Support Service (BSS)/Education Otherwise Than at School Service (EOTAS)** includes a 20 place Pupil Referral Unit and the peripatetic service to mainstream schools with 9.5 teachers and four day teaching units. The service undertakes detailed monitoring of excluded pupils and manages to place the vast majority in alternative provision. The peripatetic service supported pupils in half of schools during 1997/8. In ten of the schools visited this support was singled out for praise: there was no criticism.

67. The Area Learning Support Service, the Behaviour Support Service and the other services under the SENSS umbrella were almost universally praised in the schools visited.

MANAGEMENT SERVICES

68. Four services were inspected, of which three were well regarded and effective. Although the other (premises) was more variable in quality, taken together those services help to provide an effective infrastructure, freeing schools to concentrate, without distraction, on their main task of raising educational standards.

69. **Financial services** provide effective support and advice to schools, enabling them to set

their budgets and monitor expenditure effectively. The schools have a high regard for these services, and it is partly through their assistance that only three schools have (modest) budget deficits.

70. **Personnel** provides effective support, particularly over difficult issues, such as competency or disciplinary procedures. Headteachers have a high regard for the service, but are not clear about its full cost, which is high.

71. **The Information Technology for Administration** service is similarly expensive, but well regarded by schools. All but two of the schools visited could show evidence that the efficiency of their administration, leading to savings of valuable staff time, had been improved with the help of the service.

72. **Premises services** presented, as usual, a more mixed picture. Some aspects of emergency repairs were quoted as being very helpful, and all schools felt that the LEA had done much to clarify landlord/tenant responsibilities. However, schools were more critical about the performance of Service Direct and only two had any knowledge of the LEA's system for prioritising developments.

SECTION 5 : SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING STANDARDS

LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING STANDARDS AT KEY STAGE 3

The LEA has appropriately targeted support for improving standards at Key Stage 3: it is a priority in its Education Development Plan and is supported by additional funding of £1 million. The most successful activities are small in number and clearly focused upon identified weaknesses; the initiative is less successful when activities are too numerous and not targeted.

The LEA'S contribution

73. In 1998 the LEA initiated a project to raise standards at Key Stage 3 with a target of five per cent improvement in end of Key Stage assessments tests in 1998. This target was met in English only, although the improvement in results was lower than that nationally. Raising standards at Key Stage 3 has been included as a priority in the Education Development Plan.

74. The LEA's strategy has the support of all secondary schools and suggests that schools:

- prepare a Key Stage 3 improvement action plan
- appoint a Key Stage 3 co-ordinator
- promote non-teaching staff to support learning resource centre work
- allocate increased capitation
- give supply cover for cross-phase initiatives
- provide financial support for Year 6 pupils to use ICT
- set up after school homework clubs
- use additional statistical data

75. Extra funding has been secured, amounting to about £1 million. This has been devolved to schools to provide additional staff for literacy, numeracy and ICT, with additional pupil groups identified for intensive support. Six schools have enhanced posts for Key Stage co-ordinators and others have up-dated school resources.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

76. Standards at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory in three of the eight secondary schools visited and continue to be unsatisfactory in at least one core subject in five schools. Standards have improved in six of the schools. The high priority which the LEA has placed on raising standards at Key Stage 3 has contributed to this improvement.

77. This project is a good example of LEA leadership in identifying an LEA-wide issue and deploying resources and services in a flexible way to support school-based developments. The Director of Education's personal intervention has ensured that the initiative is given a high profile. School staff have appreciated his supportive approach, which has raised the awareness of schools of the need for improvement.

78. The LEA has continued to provide effective support to the initiative. A senior inspector has responsibility for co-ordination and has visited schools to analyse development plans. Schools have found the visits helpful. Training courses and meetings of Key Stage co-ordinators have helped to promote developments. The schools have had the freedom to use the additional funding flexibly, although the LEA has monitored the schools' expenditure carefully.

79. Schools have used the LEA's strategy to structure their own Key Stage 3 improvement plan. Although the activities identified are all appropriate, schools have tended to try to make developments on every issue. This has led to schools developing a number of initiatives: for instance, most schools intend to improve the liaison with feeder primary schools, but the strategies which are planned are seldom more than would be expected as normal practice.

80. Several schools have ensured that these activities are becoming embedded in the work of every subject department. In other schools there is a danger that where there are fundamental weaknesses in subject departments, and these have not improved, some of the initiatives may be peripheral. The project is new, but in some schools the number of initiatives is too large for there to be in-depth focus on development which would lead to long term and sustainable improvements. In these early stages, support from the literacy projects, the raising achievement projects and summer schools have been the most effective.

81. The LEA recognises the importance of good co-ordination. Steps have been taken to ensure this and these are at an early stage of development. The subject monitoring conducted by inspectors and the work of the education welfare service can also make an important contribution. The projects are being carefully monitored but a similarly detailed approach to the dissemination of good practice between schools is not in place.

LEA SUPPORT FOR PERFORMANCE DATA AND TARGET SETTING

The LEA's supply to schools of helpful information regarding pupil performance is comprehensive, accurate and timely. Advice to schools on the use of such data for the purpose of setting targets and improving standards is mainly clear, practical and appropriate to schools.

The LEA contribution

82. The LEA circulates a very good range of comprehensive, accurate and timely data to schools which should enable them to conduct a thorough analysis of performance as a basis for target setting and planning. The link inspectors have been trained to provide individual assistance to schools interpreting the data. In addition schools can receive assistance on more complex statistical issues from the Performance Review Officer.

83. The LEA has devised an approach to target setting which is clear and practical and encourages schools to use the analysis of data to plan appropriate strategies to make improvements. Conferences were held with primary and secondary schools on this common approach and using the full portfolio of data circulated by the LEA. Schools analyse data and make comparisons with benchmarked groups to identify potential for improvement. Predictions

are made on the scores of individual pupils, which are then collated. These are then discussed with link inspectors, who have the role of both assisting schools in setting the targets and also critically questioning as to whether the targets are challenging yet realistic. The school's targets are generally agreed with a mutual recommendation from the head and the link inspector to the governing body.

84. The LEA takes appropriate action to ensure that the targets are challenging by making the best data available, encouraging schools to use comparative data and providing the support of trained link advisers to discuss schools' analysis and prospective targets. Divisional Inspectors finally review the appropriateness of the targets. Further intervention has been required in very few schools.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

85. LEA support is effective and provides satisfactory value for money in 21 schools visited in 14 of these, good value. The provision of data and support for target setting is appropriate for school needs in all secondary schools and all but one primary school visited. This contribution is effective in all secondary schools and all but three primary schools visited. It is good in six out of eight secondary schools and ten out of the sixteen primary schools visited. A minority of schools require greater support to interpret data effectively and understand its usefulness. Very little support, for instance, has been provided to special schools to assist them with the difficult issues of setting targets in a meaningful way.

86. Schools appreciate that the data which is provided is of a high quality, of sufficient variety and is circulated to schools in a timely way, but the extent to which schools are able to interpret and use the data confidently is more varied. All the secondary schools and eight primary schools are expert and use the data not only to set targets but also more widely, to sharpen staff understanding and identify more precisely the areas of underachievement, to improve the schools' strategic planning and to assist with monitoring and evaluation of school effectiveness. These schools make good use of the potential of comparative data and are beginning to track the value added by the different key stages as pupils progress through their schooling. A further three primary schools make satisfactory use of the data to set targets. The schools which did not use the data effectively required more help with their analysis and use.

87. Link inspector support is variable in its quality and effectiveness. The support was very effective in four primary schools and four secondary schools. In these schools the link inspector worked with the headteacher and other staff, provided training on the approach and interpretation of the data and discussed and questioned the headteacher on the targets set. In addition, at least two primary schools had contracted support from the Curriculum and Professional Development Service which was helpful and effective. One of these schools was a very small school where the support had led to the confident use of data to pose evaluative questions and had enabled the school to set meaningful targets with some confidence.

88. In four of the primary schools where data was not used, the link inspectors had not provided a sufficient explanation or an incisive evaluation of the targets set by the school. They had not questioned why the school had not used the data or the basis on which the school set

the targets. Inaccuracies in the interpretation of data and inconsistencies in the targets which had been set had not been identified and discussed.

LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING THE STANDARDS OF LITERACY

The LEA has appropriately targeted support for improving the standards of literacy: it is a priority in its Education Development Plan. It is extensive, well structured and effective and provided in proportion to schools' needs. The Key Stage 3 literacy project is very effective and provides good value for money. Monitoring of effectiveness and arrangements for transition between primary and secondary schools show weaknesses.

The LEA's Contribution

89. Improving standards of literacy is a priority in the Education Development Plan. The LEA began work on improving the standards of literacy with a number of projects before the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. These projects, in particular "Jolly Phonics", have provided a foundation for the current work.

90. In primary schools, the project covers 250 schools and the support provided has been extensive. Training courses have been provided for schools' literacy co-ordinators, headteachers and governors. The three consultants each have a caseload of nine 'intensive' schools which in addition to a training course have received 18 hours of support. All the 'lighter touch' schools had been visited by the Summer term 1998. Thereafter, all schools were visited 'in order of greatest need'. Visits generally last half a day. The visits are supported by cluster group meetings. In the 'lighter touch' schools visits concentrate mainly on management issues. Two curriculum support teachers also provide support. The Schools' Library Service provides good support. A Literacy Centre is now open. A helpline answers teachers' immediate difficulties.

91. The Key Stage 3 literacy project had already started before the LEA was given Key Stage 3 pilot status. The project is meeting a need genuinely identified by both schools and the LEA. Three consultants have been appointed. The focus of the project is clearly defined and aims to develop cross-curricular approaches to enhancing literacy skills, initially targeting Year 7 pupils.

92. The model of support provided by the project is very well structured and combines training with follow up, in-school support and advice. It also enables schools to develop their own initiatives. A core team of teachers has been established in each school. All teams have attended core and optional extension training and all schools have produced action plans. The core team has cascaded this training to school staff using materials and strategies developed by the project support teachers. As a result of the training schools have prepared a literacy plan. The initiatives are well supported by consultants who visit to advise on specific initiatives, check the practice in schools and ensure good management.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

93. The LEA has provided effective support to the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in primary schools. In all the schools visited implementation is consistently sound and the support is provided in proportion to schools' needs. Lighter touch schools have made good use of the training which has been provided and schools which are supported intensively are beginning to make real gains in improving classroom practice and National Curriculum results. However, special schools require more specialised support largely because of the wide range and complexity of pupils' needs.

94. The initial training programme for literacy co-ordinators, headteachers and governors was effective and successful in providing a firm basis for development. It enhanced the enthusiasm of teachers and even won over some sceptics. The in-school support of literacy consultants and monitoring visits have proved helpful. Schools also feel well supported with appropriate resources including, in one school, a family literacy project involving 10 families.

95. Monitoring of developments is somewhat patchy. In at least six schools link inspectors have provided classroom evaluations and have also commented on samples of pupils' work. In other schools headteachers or literacy co-ordinators have monitored classroom developments. However, in about five schools no monitoring had taken place. Liaison between primary and secondary schools is also weak and the value of cross-phase dissemination of good practice is being missed. Nevertheless there is consistent, thorough and effective support provided for this strategy which has resulted in school improvement and which provides value for money.

96. The Key Stage 3 literacy project is providing effective support which has stimulated key improvements in schools in a relatively short time. The work of the project is universally regarded as relevant, expert and helpful by the schools and has the support of headteachers, who regard the focus of the project as critical to raising standards. It provides good value for money.

97. This initiative is in its early stages and therefore its contribution to raising standards is still limited. Nevertheless, standards in Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests are rising in three of the eight schools visited. In three others, pupils' written work shows improvement although this has not yet been reflected in results. There was evidence of improvement in the awareness of teachers of the importance of literacy and renewed confidence in the teaching methods. This resulted in higher priority given to literacy in the schools. Improvements in teaching and learning strategies have been made, particularly in English.

98. Although the project focuses on cross-curricular developments, the outcomes of the support are more visible in English. Understandably, because the project is a relatively recent initiative, they are less consistently secure throughout all departments.

99. There is the likelihood of further improvement when primary-aged pupils with experience of the literacy hour transfer to secondary schools where this learning can be reinforced. One secondary school had successfully met its feeder primary schools to discuss mutual developments but not all the secondary schools were familiar with the

progress of the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in their feeder primary schools. Effective co-ordination between the primary and secondary schools did not have a sufficiently high priority.

LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING THE STANDARDS OF NUMERACY

The LEA has appropriately targeted support for improving the standards of numeracy: it is a priority in its Education Development Plan. It is thorough and well planned and usually provided in proportion to schools' needs. As with literacy, monitoring of effectiveness and arrangements for transition between primary and secondary schools shows weaknesses.

The LEA's contribution

100. The National Numeracy Project is being implemented in 60 LEA schools. Thirty-two schools have been identified for intensive support in the first instance. Requests from schools to join the project have been greater than the number of places available and an additional 19 schools have therefore been included in the Durham Numeracy Project.

101. Consultants work in schools, teach demonstration lessons, and help teachers to develop strategies to cope with the project. This work is also supported by mathematics curriculum support teachers in other schools across the County. The strategy is managed by the Mathematics Inspector, who is also a link inspector.

102. The support provided is thorough, well planned and includes central courses, in-school training and visits of consultants to the school. The initiatives are well resourced with useful supporting materials and teachers have access to resources from the mathematics centre.

103. The CAME project (Cognitive Acceleration in Maths Education) is targeted on Year 7 and Year 8 pupils in a number of secondary schools. Work is being developed to apply the learning principles behind the scheme to other areas of the curriculum.

The effectiveness of the LEA 's contribution

104. The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy starts one year later than the National Literacy Strategy, hence LEA support therefore is understandably much less consistent than for literacy. Nonetheless, the LEA's pilot initiatives are providing a good foundation for its implementation across all the LEA's schools. In most cases, the additional support has been deployed to schools which have the most need. Of the schools visited, two secondary schools and six primary schools had not received any additional support for mathematics. In five of the primary schools, standards in mathematics were very high and support was not required but in one primary school and the two secondary schools standards were low.

105. Two primary schools received support under the Durham Numeracy Project three years ago and two were included in the project this year. A further three primary schools were included in the National Numeracy Project. Two other schools had received

contributions from support teachers and one was making use of the LEA's mathematics centre. In these schools, improvements had been made including better planning, improvements in the variety of teaching and learning strategies. Numeracy co-ordinators had been empowered by the substantial support and training to work more effectively with other teachers in the school.

106. The weaknesses are very similar to those found in the National Literacy Strategy: weak approaches to liaison between primary and secondary schools; patchy strategies for monitoring developments and limited evidence of dissemination of some of the very good practice which exists in schools.

LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING PUPIL ATTENDANCE

Attendance in secondary schools is below the national figure and that of statistical neighbours, and remains static. Improving pupil attendance needs to be given a higher priority and more consistent support than at present. The level of support for improving pupil attendance is not clearly related to the attendance and absence levels and is not appropriately weighted towards schools with greatest need.

The LEA's contribution

107. The LEA's support for improving pupil attendance is provided principally through the Education Welfare Service. The LEA has plans for a major restructuring of the service. New proposals, about to be discussed with staff and headteacher representatives, have four key elements: a referral system, the allocation of officer time based upon assessed need, the establishment of a specialised service for the different phases of education and service agreements with each school.

108. Currently, schools in the primary phase receive levels of support in excess of their needs and schools in the secondary phase receive levels of support which too often fail to bring about improvement. The deployment and school visiting patterns of education welfare officers bear little relationship to the levels of attendance and unauthorised absence: too often education welfare officers visit schools in the primary phase on a weekly or fortnightly basis when secondary schools in the same area have attendance rates below 90 per cent and falling. Part of this low in secondary schools militate against the necessary desired improvements in pupil attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4.

109. Apart from basic attendance and unauthorised absence data, detailed analysis of attendance/absence patterns is rarely found. Registration systems vary across schools. There are no standardised trigger points of referral for involvement of the Education Welfare Service therefore data on caseloads and numbers of referrals is localised and unreliable. Much of the analysis of need is based upon local knowledge. In a county characterised by many small schools such knowledge is soundly based but vulnerable when there are staff changes.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

110. LEA support to improving pupil attendance was inspected in a sample of eight secondary schools and 12 schools in the primary phase.

111. The LEA's claim in its Education Development Plan that the "situation" is improving as a result of initiatives targeted at reducing truancy should be tempered by the fact that attendance rates in secondary schools have remained virtually static over the last four years (88.8 per cent; 88.5 per cent; 89.1 per cent; 89.2 per cent). The LEA acknowledges the need to improve attendance in secondary schools in its Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 Action Plans, but specific targets for individual secondary schools are neither widely known, nor soundly based.

112. In five of the eight secondary schools visited, levels of attendance remain below 90 per cent and in half the rates of attendance have deteriorated since the last inspection report. In three of the 12 schools in the primary phase which were visited rates of attendance are deteriorating.

113. The support to improvement in pupil attendance is only effective in half of the secondary schools visited. Characteristics of effectiveness are good registration procedures which can generate detailed data, swift and consistent response to absence by schools, the use of other agencies to help improve attendance, the preventative targeting of 'at risk' groups of pupils and a whole-school approach to the issue led at a senior management level in the school.

114. Where attendance rates are low or deteriorating there is a lack of sophistication in analysing needs and a lack of consistency and stability in Education Welfare Service support, with frequent staff changes or absences. The direct work of individual education welfare officers was praised in all of the schools visited. In one school where attendance was highlighted as a key issue in its inspection report, the link inspector monitored progress with insufficient rigour.

115. The use of alternative packages of education and the work-related curriculum are modest. There is no focused and consistent approach to the use of the LEA's statutory powers to prosecute parents in order to send a clear message to parents of the seriousness with which the LEA takes this matter.

116. The costs of the service are broadly in line with national averages. In secondary schools attendance is below national averages, and judged to be less than satisfactory in more than half of the schools visited. Thus the value for money provided by LEA services to support improvement in attendance in secondary schools is unsatisfactory.

LEA SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS REQUIRING SPECIAL MEASURES OR SCHOOLS WITH SERIOUS WEAKNESSES

117. **The LEA has proportionately fewer schools requiring special measures and with serious weaknesses than any other county LEA in England. This is an impressive record. The LEA's own strategy for identification and support to schools causing concern is not sufficiently clear to schools.**

The LEA's contribution

118. The LEA now has a formal grading system for identifying and intervening in schools causing concern. Twenty-five schools are designated as requiring additional support and monitoring and eight schools as "likely to cause concern". The special school with serious weaknesses is in the highest category of "causing concern". The number of schools in each category is declining.

119. The LEA's new written strategy for identifying and intervening in schools causing concern features in the Education Development Plan. Despite consultation about the Plan, schools are not yet familiar with the grading system nor whether they have been identified as causing concern. This obscurity is compounded by the fact that written Notes of Visit, completed by Link Inspectors and which form an integral part of the identification process are not shared with headteachers.

The effectiveness of the LEA contribution

120. Only one maintained school in Durham has been judged to require special measures since 1993. In addition, one primary and one special school are currently identified as having serious weaknesses.

121. The primary school identified as having serious weaknesses has made a purposeful response to its inspection report. Priorities have been appropriately identified, and the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the key issues relating to its serious weaknesses.

122. The LEA's support for the primary school with serious weaknesses is appropriate and effective. The LEA has appointed two acting headteachers and given them regular support from the LEA. The LEA has effectively provided a clear educational direction for the work of the school, with a strong focus on raising standards. A budget deficit situation has been resolved with support from the LEA, including the part funding of the release of the headteacher to support improvements in the school.

SECTION 6: SUPPORT TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

LEA support for improving the quality of teaching

The LEA's support for teaching is generally effective with improvements in teaching observed in eleven of the schools visited. Support from the curriculum support teachers is particularly well focused and effective. However, the provision of support is insufficiently targeted at those schools and departments which need it the most. Support for headteacher appraisal is inconsistent, despite link inspector time being allocated to this responsibility. Support for Newly Qualified Teachers is satisfactory but not consistent.

The LEA's contribution

123. The LEA seeks to support improvement in the quality of teaching through "in depth work in schools". This has three main strands: subject inspector visits to secondary schools and phase inspectors to primary schools, support from the Curriculum Support Team, and in-service training courses.

124. Secondary schools receive 15 days subject advice over a two-year period. The visit follows agreed protocols and leads to a written report which includes targets for the department to meet before the next visit.

125. In-school support is available from Curriculum Support Teachers. In addition, the LEA manages a comprehensive in-service programme which is well advertised in advance. A minority of courses are over-subscribed but too many do not run owing to a lack of participants. One school expressed serious concerns about this position which had resulted in 18 of the 79 courses for which its teachers had applied being either postponed, cancelled or significantly changed. Consideration is being given to increasing flexibility and providing more school based training courses as a means of enhancing impact but the implications of these plans are not sufficiently clear to schools.

126. A worthwhile training course consisting of three half-days is organised for newly qualified teachers. The course comprises three half-day sessions on managing classroom behaviour, special educational needs and teaching and learning styles. Subject courses for newly qualified teachers are organised in mathematics and modern languages. A highly regarded complementary course for mentors is held, although there is no opportunity for mentors to meet with the new teachers collectively.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

127. Evidence from OFSTED inspections indicates that the quality of education provided in two-thirds of primary schools is good or very good. This is a higher proportion than found nationally. Fifty seven per cent of secondary schools were considered to be good or very good. This is lower than that found nationally. Substantial improvements were needed in nine primary schools and two secondary schools. In ten of the schools visited improvements had been made

since the school's last OFSTED Inspection.

128. Subject inspector monitoring visits to secondary school departments vary greatly in their effectiveness. Although valued by heads of department, a lack of consistency in their approach affects the potential for school improvement. The visits are not conducted using a common framework and there is little evidence of co-ordination across subjects to ensure common themes are pursued in each visit. Visits vary in length and frequency: in one instance the subject inspector had not provided written feedback and in another school the same inspector had not undertaken a school visit for almost three years. The subject inspectors' written reports vary in style, length, format and quality of evaluation.

129. The work of curriculum support teachers is effective. Schools have received valuable practical support. For example, curriculum support teachers have successfully assisted with rewriting schemes of work in science, ICT and technology, advised on strategies to facilitate pupils' independent learning, supported the development of assessment within the school through the production of a whole-school policy and staff in-service training and undertaken detailed work in the development of literacy across subjects in a secondary school.

130. The LEA provides satisfactory support for newly qualified teachers and they receive good support from schools, although there is no co-ordinated approach to the induction. Link inspectors, for instance, do not have a consistent approach to supporting newly qualified teachers. Some newly qualified teachers are observed teaching regularly and have been given useful and valued feedback; others have received no support from the link inspector. The LEA has little knowledge of the initial teacher training arrangements in schools. Of the 26 schools visited, at least eight are in partnership with local universities.

131. The LEA's scheme for teacher appraisal has lapsed. However, teacher appraisal in some form operates in six of the schools visited. The LEA's scheme for headteacher appraisal is operative in nine of the schools visited and the headteachers participating judged it to be useful. Link inspectors do not consistently monitor the implementation of the headteacher appraisal scheme, despite being allocated half a day per school annually for this purpose.

SECTION 7: SUPPORT TO IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF SCHOOLS

LEA support for improving management and planning

The LEA's support for management was judged to be good in almost one-third of the schools visited, but too often it varied in quality and lacked sufficient challenge. The range of management courses provides good support for middle and senior managers and is effectively supporting the implementation of school self-evaluation strategies.

The LEA's contribution

132. The LEA has rightly identified Leadership and Management as a priority in its Education Development Plan. Currently, the main focus of support is the link inspector who meets the headteacher on a termly basis to monitor the school's progress. The agenda for all headteachers has a common core with additional items pertinent to the school. Prior to a school's first OFSTED Inspection, link or subject inspectors supported schools by observing lessons and analysing documentation.

133. The Management Development Centre provides a wide range of courses for middle and senior management. This involves management training for deputies aspiring to headship including HEADLAMP and modules for the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). It also leads the training and support for Investors in People accreditation and Assertive Discipline.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

134. OFSTED inspections found that management and efficiency were good or very good in three-quarters of primary schools, which is a higher percentage than that found nationally. Only five schools required significant improvement. Sixty two per cent of secondary schools were judged good or very good compared with 69 per cent nationally. Eight schools required substantial improvement.

135. The quality and effectiveness of support received by school managers are variable. Schools valued the regular support provided by the link inspector, although there was little evidence of a measurable impact on improvements in standards and quality. Link inspectors provide good support to schools in finding solutions to difficult personnel problems and advising governors on senior staff appointments. Nevertheless, in the schools visited, five headteachers or deputies considered their induction and continued support programmes to be inadequate.

136. The extent to which the link inspector visits focus sufficiently on developing schools' capability to manage their own self improvement or provide an effective challenge to schools' attainment varies considerably. Link inspector visits were considered challenging in eight schools but they had not always established a clear distinction between, on the one hand, supporting and training school managers to fulfil their role and, on the other hand, undertaking tasks themselves: for example, in the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching.

137. School self-evaluation, monitoring and review are key activities in the LEA's Education and Development Plan. Of the 26 schools visited, eleven schools had a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. Heads of department and members of senior management teams had been trained effectively through courses at the Management Development Centre to evaluate teaching and to provide constructive oral and written feedback to teachers. In the remaining schools monitoring was unsystematic or inadequate. In four schools, too great a responsibility for the monitoring of teaching rested inappropriately with the link and subject inspectors.

138. The Management Development Centre's programme of training is well regarded by those teachers who attend the courses. The middle management course is particularly effective. However, there is no evidence of co-ordination of the work of the Centre with that of Link Inspectors. The Centre also provides expert training in Assertive Discipline. Teachers from at least two of the schools visited had attended training on Assertive Discipline. They had found the courses very helpful in reviewing their behaviour policy even though one school had not implemented the programme. In both schools, the training had led to constructive improvements in school organisation and classroom practice. School staff are prepared for Investors in People status at the Management Development Centre. Thirty schools in the LEA have achieved this award.

Support for school planning for improvement

139. In nine of the schools visited during the inspection development planning was good, in four it was unsatisfactory.

140. One aspect of the LEA's support for schools in their planning is to provide a template, available on computer disk, of a school management plan. This encourages schools to collate a wide range of related documentation but the resulting documentation does not help to give clarity to the priorities for improvement.

141. Monitoring of development plans is carried out during the regular termly link inspectors visits. In the best examples, inspectors provide pertinent comments on development plans, consistently follow up on progress made in implementing the development plan by seeking objective evidence, and insist that the school consider realistic but challenging targets for improvement. Headteachers do not receive written feedback on the inspectors' judgements relating to the progress made.

Support for governors

The LEA provides good support for governors including advice on the appointment of headteachers and deputy headteachers. The LEA has rightly identified the development of "The Effective Governor" as a task within its Education Development Plan. Governing bodies have yet to develop their leadership and management responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating the work of their schools. The service is high quality/high cost based upon its definition of the proportion of time it devotes to supporting governing bodies.

The LEA contribution

142. The School and Governors Support Service provides support to governors and area support for the Local Management of Schools. Support for school governors includes a comprehensive clerking service to schools and a very high number of schools (294 schools out of 299) buy back the service. A survey of governors' views on the "Quality of the Clerking Service to Schools" was conducted in spring 1998. Agendas were judged to be relevant to the needs of governing bodies and the overall contribution of clerks to meetings was judged to be at least good by 98 per cent of governors.

143. A comprehensive training programme for governors is managed and co-ordinated by the Governor Unit within the School and Governor Support Service. Courses are evaluated and responses are summarised on a termly basis. A summary of Governor Course evaluation for the Summer Term 1998 comprised mostly positive comments.

The effectiveness of the LEA's contribution

144. Governors are well supported by the LEA; this is typified by one vice chair who said the support received "made it easy to be a governor". Vacancies for LEA governors are very low.

145. The clerking service is highly regarded by all schools visited for its quality of advice and guidance, efficiency and timeliness of papers for meetings. Training is well organised and a good variety of courses are provided, which governors find useful.

146. Governors receive high quality advice and guidance and are well informed by a variety of publications. Consultation papers are often summarised, a termly newsletter is published and data is provided to inform discussion, for example, on target setting and teachers' salaries. Guidance is published on the role of LEA governors and draft policies are distributed.

147. Advice and support from the link inspector on key staffing appointments are good and much valued by schools. Additionally, the instant access to officers and their swift response to problems raised by governors reflect best practice.

148. The LEA has correctly identified "support for school governing bodies" as an activity within its Education Development Plan. In the schools visited there was only limited evidence of governors monitoring and evaluating the work of their schools.

149. There is a clear structure of consultation with governors although its effectiveness is variable. Although chairs of governors had been sent copies of the LEA's Education Development Plan, neither this nor the implications of Fair Funding had been widely discussed by all the governing bodies of schools visited. The opportunity for chairs to meet the Director of Education at the Chairs in Partnership Forum is valued as is the termly meeting with the Director and senior LEA managers, which is a useful forum for raising issues or concerns and receiving more detailed information from the LEA.

150. The annual buy back price of the Governor Support Service - £475 for primary schools and £795 for secondary schools - is felt by schools to provide excellent value for money. From their point of view, it does. However, the costs of the service are higher and more funds will be available for delegation in April 2000. Schools will then be able to make increasingly informed choices about those services they wish to purchase from the LEA and those which they may wish to purchase from elsewhere or provide themselves.

APPENDIX I - FUNDING

TABLE 1: SSA/SPENDING

	1997/98	1998/99
Education SSA (EM)	178.1	194.5
Education Spend (EM)	187.6	200.7
Spend as % of SSA	105.4	103.2

(Source. LEA/Audit Commission)

TABLE 2: AVERAGE PER PUPIL FUNDING

	1997/98	1998/99
Primary (£)	1,414	1,483
Secondary (£)	2,040	2,141
Special (£)	7,551	8,057

(Source. LEA Section 122 Statements)

TABLE 3: LEVELS OF DELEGATION

	1997/98	1998/99
Primary (%)	83.2	83.4
Secondary (%)	94.6	94.6
Special (%)	90.2	90.2

(Source. LEA Section 122 Statements)

TABLE 4: GENERAL SCHOOLS BUDGET (GSB)

	1997/98	1998/99		1997/98	1998/99
Primary (£M)	96.1	99.4	(£ per pupil)	2,085	2,181
Secondary (£M)	83.8	88.0	(£ per pupil)	2,591	2,725
Special (£M)	12.7	13.6	(£ per pupil)	13,459	14,350

APPENDIX 2: THE PERFORMANCE OF MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

PUPILS' ATTAINMENT

Attainment at age 7 KS 1 tests/tasks

	Year	% of pupils achieving Level 2 or above					
		Teacher Assessment			Tasks/tests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1997	80.5	80.4	0.1			
	1998	81.8	81.4	0.4			
English (reading)	1997	80.3	80.1	0.2	80.7	80.1	0.6
	1998	80.7	80.8	-0.1	78.0	77.4	0.6
English (writing)	1997				81.4	80.4	1.0
	1998				83.4	81.4	2.4
Mathematics	1997	85.1	84.2	0.9	85.7	83.7	2.0
	1998	86.0	85.5	0.5	87.1	84.8	2.3
Science	1997	87.2	85.5	1.6			
	1998	88.2	85.5	1.4			

Source :DfEE

2. Attainment at age 11 KS2 tests/tasks

	Year	% Pupils achieving Level 4 or above					
		Teacher assessment			Tasktests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1997	63.8	63.4	0.4			
	1998	X	X	X			
Mathematics	1997	66.7	64.1	2.6	65.7	62.0	3.7
	1998	X	X	X	62.6	58.5	4.1
Science	1997	70.6	69.5	1.1			
	1998	X	X	X			

Source :DfEE

3. Attainment at age 14 KS3tests/tasks

	Year	% Pupils achievingLevel 4 or above					
		Teacher assessment			Tasktests		
		LEA	National	Difference	LEA	National	Difference
English	1997	56.6	60.2	-3.6	52.7	56.6	-3.9
	1998	X	X	X	59.4	65.1	-5.7
Mathematics	1997	57.6	64.0	-6.4	55.1	60.7	-5.6
	1998	X	X	X	56.1	59.9	-3.8
Science	1997	57.3	62.2	-4.9	56.4	60.8	-4.4
	1998	X	X	X	51.9	56.5	-4.6

Source :DfEE

4. Attainment at age 16 GCSE results in maintained schools

Level achieved	Year	LEA	National	Difference
1 A*-G	1996	93.1	93.9	-0.8
	1997	92.5	94.0	-1.5
	1998	93.9	65.2	-1.3
5 A*-C	1996	36.4	42.6	-6.2
	1997	37.1	43.3	-6.2
	1998	36.2	44.4	-8.2
5 A*-G	1996	86.1	88.1	-2.0
	1997	85.7	88.5	-2.8
	1998	87.1	89.6	-2.5

Pupils aged 15 at the beginning of the school year and on the roll in January of that year Source: DfEE

Attainment at age 18 A level results Average point score per pupil

Number entered	Year	LEA	National	Difference
2 or more	1996	16.2	16.8	-0.6
	1997	17.5	17.1	0.4
	1998	17.7	17.5	0.2
Less than 2	1996	2.8	2.7	0.1
	1997	2.5	2.7	-0.2
	1998	3.0	2.8	0.2

Source: DfEE

6. Vocational qualifications of 16 to 18 year olds in maintained schools

Level achieved	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Pass entries	1995	92.7	80.2	12.5
Pass entries (Advanced)	1996	78.8	79.3	-0.5
	1997	74.5	75.4	-0.9
	1998	x	x	x
Pass entries (Intermediate)	1996	65.7	69.1	-3.4
	1997	60.5	68.9	-8.4
	1998	x	x	x

Source: DfEE

7. Attendance

Percentage of pupil sessions	Year	LEA	National	Difference
Attendance in primary schools	1996	93.2	93.4	-0.2
	1997	93.8	93.9	-0.1
	1998	x	x	x
Attendance in secondary schools	1996	88.5	90.5	-2.0
	1997	89.1	90.9	-1.7
	1998	x	x	x

Source: DfEE

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