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INTRODUCTION

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

2. This second inspection has followed up the progress of the LEA in implementing the post-inspection action plan and its Education Development Plan. It also evaluated the progress made by the LEA in supporting the central government initiatives of Excellence in Cities and the extension of Fair Funding.

3. The inspection was conducted by a small team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and an additional inspector in conjunction with the Audit Commission. The inspection involved scrutinising documentation and interviewing elected members, the director of education and culture, senior officers and inspectors. Discussions were held with diocesan officers, with a representative of the social services department, with representative groups of governors, headteachers and teachers, and with the principal and vice principal of the college of further education. In addition, headteachers of all secondary schools were interviewed. A questionnaire referred to as the school survey, inviting comments on LEA support was sent to all schools and replies were received from 80 per cent of them. Account was also taken of evidence from other divisions within OFSTED.

COMMENTARY

4. Doncaster local education authority was first inspected in September 1999 and found to have weaknesses in a large number of its functions and services, which resulted in schools not always being supported effectively in their work. For example, the previous inspection found that raising standards had insufficient priority despite the council's focus on regeneration. This has changed. The raising of standards is now paramount and the council has ensured that education has an important place in corporate plans. Members have played their part. They have instigated and supported improvements. They are now better informed than previously about national policy and about attainment and performance, not only in the borough as a whole, but also in individual schools.

5. The LEA has made satisfactory progress across most of the 25 recommendations of the first inspection report and the Education Development Plan priorities. As a result of a number of these developments, improvements have occurred in schools. In some cases, where developments are very recent the impact is just beginning to be felt in schools. In some instances, however, the LEA has not managed change well. This is evident where there has been the need for clear vision and strong strategic management. Although there has been much activity in many aspects of work, it has not always had the strategic focus necessary to ensure that improvements have ensued. Progress in some areas has also been hindered by the lack of robust and reliable mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the LEA's actions.

6. While the LEA has its sights now more focused on raising standards, development in some important areas has been either too slow or too narrowly focused on meeting requirements rather than seeking real improvements. This has been so in its approach to the crucial areas of budget planning, the involvement of schools in applying the principles of Best Value, targeting resources to priorities and performance management. In addition, there are weaknesses in reviewing and improving the 14-19 curriculum and post-16 education. The LEA acted quickly, but not wisely, in responding to the first inspection report's recommendation about rationalising post-16 provision. Its strategy was ill-considered. As a result, relationships with some of its secondary schools were damaged and time was lost. Relationships between secondary schools and the LEA have improved and the LEA is now examining its rationale for post-16 provision and involving schools routinely in consultation.

7. After the first inspection the LEA, with the assistance of the Local Government Association, secured the help of Warwickshire LEA. The Doncaster and Warwickshire partnership has been a vital factor, which has helped Doncaster to focus on the necessary improvements, and to plan and carry out appropriate actions. Examples of the areas where developments have taken place are in improved planning and management within the directorate, the analysis and use of performance data, support for attendance, and support for management. The Warwickshire partnership has also made a direct contribution to the personal and professional development of staff and has helped the LEA to be more outward looking. The benefits of the partnership, described by officers, as 'low cost - high benefit' are acclaimed widely by members, officers and schools.

8. Overall, satisfactory progress has been made in many of the functions, the performance of which was criticised in the first inspection report. The following functions are performed well:

- the support for oracy;
- the support for the use of performance data and target setting;
- the support to governors; and
- the provision of information about alternative sources of support.

9. Insufficient progress has been made in a number of areas and weaknesses remain in the following functions and services:

- some aspects of strategic management and leadership;
- the allocation of resources to priorities;
- the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, intervention and support;
- the effectiveness of services to support secondary school improvement;
- the strategy and planning of post-16 provision;
- the identification of, and support for, schools likely to cause concern;
- the support and infrastructure for administrative Information and Communication Technology (ICT);
- the approach to performance management and work with schools on Best Value;
- school organisation planning; and
- the effectiveness of asset management planning to assist primary schools.

10. A great deal has been achieved, thanks in part to the significant contribution from the partnership with Warwickshire LEA. The LEA has developed, and its relationship with its schools is strong. Nevertheless, too many weaknesses remain. The fact that some are in key areas of strategic vision, leadership and performance management gives the inspection team considerable cause to doubt whether the improvements achieved are sustainable without continuing support. A further inspection will be needed.

THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

Update

11. The socio-economic context of Doncaster LEA remains broadly as it was at the time of the first inspection. The borough serves a diverse area with a large town, a number of smaller townships, several villages and rural areas. Its population is slightly below 300,000, of whom fewer than two per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Unemployment has fallen in recent years, but remains approximately two per cent above the national figure. In 2000, 24 per cent of pupils in primary schools and 22.1 per cent in secondary schools were entitled to free school meals. Both figures are higher than the national average, although slightly fewer than in former years. Until recently the LEA maintained a high proportion of statements of special need but, as a result of a policy change, these have now been reduced to 2.2 per cent in primary and 2.8 per cent of secondary-age pupils. In addition, 1.2 per cent of primary age pupils and 1.9 per cent of secondary are educated in special schools, in both cases a reduction from when the LEA was inspected previously. There are sufficient places in nursery classes for children of eligible age in the borough.

12. There are 20 infant schools, 19 junior schools, 74 primary schools, 17 secondary schools, of which 14 have sixth forms, seven special schools and five pupil referral units.

Council structure

13. Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has 63 members, of whom 40 are Labour (the whip has been withdrawn from two of these), nine are Liberal Democrat, six are Conservative, four are Community and four are Independent. The council has been implementing the modernising agenda gradually. There are currently six boards, each of which has responsibility for one of the council's directorates, of which education and culture is one.

14. The council introduced a scrutiny panel in May 2000 to carry out pilot reviews prior to the move to a fully modernised council in May 2001. The panel decides on the subjects for scrutiny and then carries this out. To date, no aspect of the education service has been scrutinised although there are plans to examine proposals for the 14-19 curriculum later this year. The education and culture board continues to carry out its own review and scrutiny until the scrutiny panel becomes fully operational in May, when the council moves to a fully modernised structure.

15. The directorate of education and culture is headed by the executive director who is supported by three heads of service, each of whom leads a division. These are: learners and communities; education standards; and planning and support services. The head of service for planning and support services took up post after the first inspection.

Performance

16. National test and examination results for the three years 1998-2000 show the progress which pupils make between key stages to be below the national average.

However, the rate of improvement is in line with the national trend in all key stages for all statutory indicators except in five A*-C GCSEs.

17. The LEA's baseline assessment data shows that levels of attainment on entry to reception classes correspond closely to the average of LEAs which use the same baseline scheme.

18. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, as measured by the percentage of pupils gaining Level 2 or above in national tests in 2000, are broadly in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level has risen steadily over recent years and rates of improvement are in line with those nationally in writing and above the national trend in reading and mathematics.

19. The national test results for pupils gaining Level 4 or above at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2000 in English (69.5 per cent), mathematics (67.5 per cent) and science (83.3 per cent) show standards below the national average. This is against national figures of 75 per cent, 71.7 per cent and 85.1 per cent respectively. The rate of improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 national test results over recent years is in line with the national trend.

20. At the end of Key Stage 3 the results of the national tests in 2000 show the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above, to be below the national average in English (56.5 per cent), mathematics (60.3 per cent) and science (55.7 per cent). These compare with national figures of 64.1 per cent, 65.5 per cent and 60.1 per cent respectively. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level has improved over recent years but is below the national trend.

21. In Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, the 2000 national test results show that Doncaster pupils performed less well than pupils in other LEAs with similar characteristics in English and mathematics in Key Stages 2 and 3. In other respects, there was no significant difference in performance between Doncaster and other LEAs with similar characteristics.

22. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at 34.7 per cent in 1998 was well below the national average of 44.7 per cent. Between 1998 and 2000 there has been an improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades, but progress is slower than the national rate and the trend in authorities with similar characteristics. The percentage of pupils gaining at least one A*-G has increased faster than the national trend, but slower than in similar authorities. The proportion of pupils (8.6 per cent) leaving school in 2000 without qualifications is higher than the national average.

23. A slight improvement in A-level standards has occurred in recent years although they remain below the national average and the average for similar authorities.

24. Primary school attendance figures are slightly below the national average but are improving. Those for secondary-age pupils are well below average.

25. Exclusion rates for primary schools are in line with the national average, but those for secondary schools are above.

Resources and Fair Funding

26. Doncaster maintains that its spending has continued at the level of its education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). Members have indicated their intention to hold expenditure at this level. This, however, includes a payment of a levy to the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority of £574,000. Although this is appropriately excluded from the Section 52 education budget statement, it may overstate the level of education expenditure against SSA. Primary school budget shares (£1,764 per pupil) are marginally below statistical neighbours¹ and metropolitan authorities (£1,805 and £1,785 per pupil respectively), while secondary budget shares are relatively high (£2,582 per pupil in Doncaster compared with £2,419 and £2,462). Special school budget shares, however, are the lowest of all metropolitan authorities and well below averages (£5,792 per pupil compared with £8,661 and £8,981 respectively). However, in reducing the real value of the Individual Schools Budget shares evenly for all sectors in order to meet its contributions to Standards Fund, the local authority has not reflected this variation. Doncaster's level of delegation to schools is on track to exceed 85 per cent of the Local Schools Budget in 2001/02.

27. Spending patterns within the education service overall are not significantly out of line with statistical neighbours and other metropolitan authorities. However, the costs of supporting statements (£70 per pupil) remain significantly above both statistical neighbours and the metropolitan averages (£56 and £41 per pupil respectively). The planned costs of financing both existing and anticipated premature retirement compensation is significantly higher in Doncaster than elsewhere (in aggregate £25 and £15 per pupil higher than neighbours and other metropolitan authorities). The funding of school improvement set out in its Section 52 statement (£11 per pupil) is significantly lower (£25 per pupil for statistical neighbours and £23 per pupil for metropolitan authorities). Doncaster anticipates that schools will contribute £5 per pupil through buying back support for Education Development Plan activities, but the reasons for the overall apparent lower costs are not clear and have not been analysed with sufficient rigour by the authority.

28. Overall, budgetary control is satisfactory. There are no significant areas of overspending, although the level of expenditure on supporting statements of special educational need has not fallen as the authority had hoped at the time of the previous inspection, and has shown a marginal increase in cash terms.

Recommendation:

In order to ensure that financial accounting is more transparent and that budgets are appropriately targeted to priorities:

- review the nature and structure of the Passenger Transport Authority subsidy and confirm the appropriateness of the charge to the education budget in respect of the council's policy intentions.

¹ Doncaster's statistical neighbours are: Wakefield, Rotherham, Redcar and Cleveland, Durham, Barnsley, Calderdale, Stockton-on-Tees, North Lincolnshire, Medway and Leeds.

SECTION 1: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The response to the first OFSTED report

29. The first inspection reported in December 1999 that the performance of schools, broadly in line with the national average at Key Stage 1, declined thereafter. Secondary schools, in particular, were not providing the quality of education needed to combat disaffection and promote social inclusion. Schooling did not take a prominent place in the council's plans for regeneration. Although the LEA was in transition and change was afoot, there were too many weaknesses in the LEA's functions and services.

30. The council has taken appropriate steps to respond to the criticisms. Transition has continued and there is a determination to improve. Doncaster's post inspection action plan states clearly its aspiration to 'be an intelligent LEA': one which knows its schools well, is alert to their different needs for support; one which knows itself and is able to judge its effectiveness; and one that learns from others. It indicates its vision to improve and has sought coherence between the post-OFSTED agenda and the LEA's major plans. The theme running throughout many statements, is that of changing the culture to one of raised expectations and achievement.

31. An LEA improvement strategy team has been established to provide an independent view of the appropriateness of the action plan and to monitor its progress. The group includes parents, local employers, diocesan members, governors, headteachers and representatives from the local further education college, the health authority and the social services department. This is a sound move, and one which goes some way towards ensuring that the LEA's actions are transparent and that progress is widely reported. In addition, progress reports on the action plan are produced for the education and culture board steering group, schools and the Department for Education and Employment. However, the key to the effectiveness in monitoring and evaluation is in the accuracy of the LEA's judgements and whether the actions taken impact positively upon standards and quality. In some instances, the progress made is too generously judged by the lead officers carrying out monitoring and evaluation. This results, in some cases, in the reader gaining the impression of actions having been taken when, in fact, they are merely at the planning stages. There are instances of too many actions not having sufficient impact upon planned outcomes.

Strategic management

32. The previous inspection found the LEA's strategic management was more effective in practice than on paper, and recommended that the place of education should be more clearly and prominently identified in the council's strategic priorities. The council has responded well to this recommendation. The council's vision for 'Doncaster as a borough of opportunity' is reflected in its strategic objectives, which are displayed prominently and circulated widely. They are to: create opportunities for social, economic and environmental regeneration; improve educational attainment and lifelong learning; develop healthier, safer communities within a sustainable environment; develop partnerships and community participation; improve equality of opportunity, and encourage modernisation and innovation.

33. Doncaster has continued the developments which were taking place when it was inspected previously. The reduction in the number of corporate departments has

resulted in education and culture having a more prominent role. Leading members have a clear view of educational issues at the strategic and operational levels. They are committed to ensuring that the place of education remains prominent and that developments are supported corporately. Strong emphasis is placed on regeneration in order to improve opportunities for Doncaster's citizens.

34. Members are better informed than previously about the work of the schools, their quality and the standards they achieve. The schedule for education and culture board meetings includes reports on topics such as the educational psychology service, the education welfare service, OFSTED reports on schools, standards in Doncaster schools compared with national and local targets and raising boys' achievement. As well as reporting the outcomes of all OFSTED reports to the board, each secondary school is reported on during the year. Reports are compiled by inspectors which contain contributions from headteachers, who are invited to be present in order to discuss with members and respond to their questions. These moves have been welcomed by members and officers and have been seen as an important part, not only of the communication process, but of securing a higher profile for, and commitment to, public and political ownership of the borough's learning agenda. This has been a very useful way of informing members of pertinent issues relating to secondary schools and has highlighted issues about which members and officers need to be better informed. These briefings continued until March 2001, and a review is planned. Now that the issues have been flagged, and members are better informed than previously, the briefings should be unnecessary, although the progress reports should continue to provide the information which members need. In addition, meetings are programmed on a ward basis when officers and members meet together to discuss relevant local issues, or how schools are progressing.

35. The contribution that the partnership with Warwickshire LEA has made to Doncaster's improvements is significant. The partnership was secured through the Local Government Association and began in March 2000. Its objective is to 'stretch and accelerate improvements' on the OFSTED action plan. Members, officers and headteachers have benefited from the close links, which have been established. In Warwickshire, they have seen a council which has education high on its agenda, an LEA which has effective relationships with its schools, and one that is successful. The partnership diagnosed the need for 'a significant system change' to enhance the capacity of Doncaster LEA's education directorate to meet the commitments of its action plan. Both LEAs have carried out the joint planning of a wide range of tasks to bring about improvement. In response to the need for a system change, three new officer posts were created to facilitate the directorate's strategic capacity: strategy manager; ICT strategy manager; and external funding officer. These posts are now filled, but it is too soon to ascertain their impact, and weaknesses in strategic management remain.

36. Members and officers speak of the positive outcomes of the opportunities of comparing and sharing practices and of Warwickshire's contribution of being a 'low cost and high benefit' to Doncaster. Such outcomes, described by those involved, are enhanced personal development and professional competence.

37. The previous report recommended that the relationship between high level strategy and operational management should be clearer in LEA documentation. The LEA has begun to take appropriate steps to ensure that documentation is clearer and that operational management is more closely aligned to strategic objectives. Within the

directorate, work to inform all employees of the LEA's strategic plans is ongoing, but is less advanced than it should be. The work of individuals, of teams, and of divisions has been scrutinised in order to help those engaged in the service to understand their roles and their contribution to the achievement of corporate aims. Plans have been examined in order to identify whether or not they correlate and where further action needs to be taken. While some progress has been made, much remains to be done. Weaknesses in vision and strategic management exist. The aims and outcomes of plans are not aligned closely enough with the objectives, and the LEA's approaches to asset management and planning for post-16 provision are unsatisfactory.

38. The previous report recommended that, in order to improve strategic management, evaluation should be strengthened by making more use of measurable indicators of success. Plans for this work are satisfactory, but progress has been too slow, and monitoring and evaluation are still unsatisfactory. For example, strong emphasis is placed within the action plan on developing the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model and using this as a tool for development. However, this is barely at the planning stage: staff have, to date, been briefed about the model and its use. Beneficial changes have taken place within the directorate to ensure that departmental managers have greater responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress and contributing to the over-riding aims of the LEA. Work has begun to link the strategic, operational and service planning and personal development reviews, but, until there are stronger linkages, the directorate's effectiveness is impeded.

39. Measurable indicators are being used to help the LEA compare its achievements and progress, but are not yet being used consistently. The electronic database for identifying those schools which are likely to cause concern is beginning to be implemented, but is not wholly reliable in achieving the desired outcomes.

40. The roles of the different groups within the directorate have been examined, clarified and where necessary refined. This has resulted in the remit and interrelationships of the groups being set out clearly.

The allocation of resources to priorities

41. Progress has been satisfactory against the authority's own action plan targets, but there are too many areas which are still unsatisfactory. Doncaster has taken steps to raise the awareness of its members in the management of its budget. However, the financial decision making is based, in the main, on incremental changes to previous budgets. There is insufficient challenge or reference to benchmarking against the performance of other local authorities. Members now receive regular financial monitoring reports on the budget, as well as periodic reports to the education and culture board on the performance of individual services. A seminar was held for members to familiarise them with budget issues and their links with budget priorities. Communications with headteachers and governors are extensive, but insufficient attention is given to the participation of schools in the identification of options and their subsequent analysis. Headteachers are given opportunities to make representations on budget issues to the leadership of the council. Briefings have been established between ward members and inspectors who work across pyramids of schools to ensure that members are better aware of the context within which they are invited to make resourcing decisions.

42. The review of pressures and priorities does not involve sufficient challenge to the appropriateness of existing spending patterns. There is a lack of rigour and clarity in identifying the consequences of spending decisions, and insufficient consideration is given to the potential of long term recycling of resources to anticipate emerging priorities. The authority presents its performance data in the context of other metropolitan authorities and statistical neighbours, but this is not mirrored in its consideration of inputs. The approach to school budget funding has been unsatisfactory, particularly in the context of the anticipated uniform reduction in the real value of Individual Schools Budget shares. However, the LEA has acknowledged the need to challenge its historically based funding model.

43. Apart from some work on energy costs, the local authority has made little progress in supporting or challenging schools to benchmark their patterns of resource deployment.

Best Value

44. The approach to Best Value and performance management has some weaknesses. Appropriate activities of the education directorate are included in the Best Value Performance Plan programme over the next five years and review areas are satisfactorily grouped and the council rightly continues to monitor the potential for adjustment to accommodate cross-cutting reviews. No reviews have yet been completed and there is some slippage in one of the two reviews scheduled to be undertaken in the current year.

45. All schools are required to submit a statement on the application of Best Value principles to accompany the submission of their annual budget plans. This has not happened satisfactorily. The guidance given to schools and the attention to the process are insufficient. There is a commendable level of brokerage undertaken by the quality assurance division to respond to schools' needs, but there is no evidence of similar activity elsewhere.

Asset management

46. There has been insufficient progress in addressing the inherent weaknesses identified in the previous report on asset management planning. Although this did not give rise to a specific recommendation, it highlighted clearly an area that required attention, one aspect of which was to help to change the perceptions of primary headteachers. The school survey shows that asset management planning continues to be judged by primary schools as unsatisfactory and significantly below comparative assessments made by schools in other authorities.

47. Schools are not clear or consistently confident about their responsibilities for property maintenance. The information flow on asset management planning and capital issues to schools is unsatisfactory. The local authority is able to provide the quality of support, but its capacity is insufficient to meet the demands. The authority has in place the elements of an asset management plan and schools have an appropriate range of documentation, including a useful analysis of individual school's expenditure on repairs and maintenance. Schools are also supplied with comparative data and information, which indicates the sum generated through the funding formula. The LEA has sought to use representative headteachers and school staff as a reference group for asset

management and capital issues. This is a good approach but there has been uneven and intermittent involvement.

48. The authority undertakes its landlord responsibilities through visits of building inspectors although there are no shared notes of visits. There is too little linkage across the directorate of the use of school formula capital funding to the school improvement agenda. The intention to undertake whole school review visits in the coming year offers the capacity to co-ordinate this.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

49. The previous inspection identified weaknesses in the LEA's support for curricular and administrative ICT and recommended that a programme should be established and implemented to meet schools' increasingly diverse needs. Specific weaknesses included a failure to provide a clear strategic overview within the authority, shortcomings in the ICT development plan, weak leadership and management of the service for ICT, and inconsistent advice on hardware. The LEA has made satisfactory progress in most of these areas.

50. The immediate response from the LEA to the criticisms in the previous inspection report was to commission a business information strategy. This is a satisfactory document, which takes account of developing an authority-wide approach to ICT and forms the basis of the draft strategy paper that has recently been circulated to schools. The appointment of an adviser with specific responsibility for ICT has been the catalyst for increasing the confidence of schools in ICT curricular support, especially from the perspective of stronger and clearer leadership. It has also added to the view from many schools that the authority is now beginning to co-ordinate, more effectively, its support for curricular ICT, including advice on hardware. Although it is too early to say how effective this strategy will be, it rightly emphasises the ICT needs of schools and generally indicates that the authority is moving in the right direction.

51. The ICT strategy action plan, which has replaced the action plan, is satisfactory overall, but lacks rigour in some of the quantifiable performance indicators and processes for monitoring the impact of using ICT in schools.

52. Progress in supporting administrative ICT, since the last inspection, has been slow and remains unsatisfactory. The electronic exchange of information, including e-mail, is limited, with the infrastructure to support it underdeveloped. Currently, the authority holds two separate databases on pupils and much of the communication with schools is paper based. Plans and funding are now in place to establish a central information management system by April 2002, and work has started in developing data collection protocols. However, it is unsatisfactory that it is to be effected without school participation. In addition, the central ledger system is to be updated, although schools are insufficiently involved in this process. The school survey shows that primary schools judge ICT administration to be unsatisfactory, and all schools, on average, judge it to be worse than at the time of the previous inspection. The authority still has much work to do to convince schools that its intentions for improving ICT administrative support are both clear and effective.

Recommendations:

In order to ensure that the work of all the groups of services within the directorate contribute to achieving the council's corporate aims, improve the quality of strategic management by:

- scheduling scrutiny of major aspects of the LEA's work and those which are the focus for development;
- discontinuing the cycle of reviews of secondary schools, except for the reporting of findings from OFSTED inspections, in order to free up officers' and members' time and allow them to concentrate more on strategic and operational management;
- ensuring that strategic plans, operational plans, service plans and departmental plans are coherent and are targeted clearly on meeting the LEA's aims; and
- instituting more rigorous and effective monitoring and evaluation procedures, which focus clearly on outcomes.

In order to ensure that resources are better focused on priorities:

- review the school funding formula involving both an analysis of organisational and curricular needs and the employment of appropriate indicators;
- undertake a more rigorous analysis of the authority's resource allocations within the education budget to take account of its comparative performance and outcomes, as well as challenging existing spending decisions;
- assist schools in identifying and challenging their own spending levels alongside others; and
- secure a consistent opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the process of challenging and assessing the appropriateness of the resourcing decisions for education.

In order to ensure that schools apply the principles of Best Value and there is a basis for challenge and monitoring by others:

- provide guidance and support to schools and implement the authority's own policy of requiring schools to submit a statement with their annual budget plan; and
- put in place performance management across the directorate.

In order to improve the management and communication of the asset management strategy:

- ensure that the stakeholder reference group is involved as a regular and active partner; and
- ensure that schools are clear about the role and regularity of the local authority's landlord function and that notes of visits are exchanged and recommendations for action are clear.

In order to improve the support for ICT:

- involve schools more fully in the development of administrative ICT; and
- expedite plans already in place and communicate these more clearly to schools.

SECTION 2: THE STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Education Development Plan

53. The seven priorities for school improvement in the Education Development Plan (EDP) are:

- to improve standards in literacy;
- to improve standards in oracy;
- to improve standards in numeracy;
- to improve standards and capability in ICT;
- to raise achievement to align with the LEA's targets particularly at GCSE level through: challenging and supporting under-performance in schools, ensuring rigorous approaches to target-setting and data analysis, and improving teaching;
- to improve pupil participation in learning through: increasing attendance, improving behaviour and motivation, reducing exclusions, ensuring a relevant curriculum, supporting disaffected pupils and providing good levels of challenge to pupils with special educational needs including the most able; and
- to improve the quality of school leadership, management and governance.

54. The LEA's appendix to the EDP for 2000/01 is a refinement of the earlier plan and aligns, where necessary, actions which form part of the post-OFSTED action plan. The EDP revisions have resulted in activities being more closely linked to priorities, but in a number of instances, the large number of activities contained within the priority are insufficiently inter-related. Although there is evidence of much work taking place, activities are not always sufficiently coherent or focused on the intended outcomes.

55. The progress made by the LEA in each of the identified priorities follows.

Priority 1: to improve standards in literacy

56. Doncaster faces considerable challenges in raising standards of literacy and achieving its target of 79 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in the National Curriculum tests for eleven-year olds. A sound start has been made. Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results have improved from 1997 to 2000. While Key Stage 1 results are in line with the national average, those for Key Stage 2 are below. Key Stage 3 results have improved marginally, but remain below average as do the results at GCSE. Raising performance across the secondary age range presents, in literacy, as in other areas, the major challenge facing the LEA.

57. The activities set out in the EDP and in the literacy action plan are appropriate and satisfactory progress has been made in achieving the objectives set. While developments across the early key stages continue, there have been significant developments in Key Stage 3, although these were delayed because the LEA experienced difficulty in recruiting a secondary consultant and because of the late arrival of the Key Stage 3 literacy guidance. A core team of four inspectors with English and phase expertise now monitor literacy. This has brought greater consistency and subject rigour to the process. In addition, a number of other useful initiatives have taken place, or have recently begun. For example, the LEA offered extension support to the eight secondary schools which had hosted literacy summer schools. In the volunteering schools, pupils were tracked by the Key Stage 3 literacy consultant in order to evaluate

the range and quality of literacy experiences offered to them. The result was that areas for development were identified, as were aspects of good practice which were then disseminated. Joint training for teachers of Year 6 and Year 7 pupils has been hosted and has been appreciated by schools, particularly those secondary schools which are, as a result, planning for greater curricular continuity. This is a worthwhile initiative which has had a positive impact on practices in schools, such as in improved curricular planning and a greater emphasis on literacy across the curriculum.

58. The school survey indicated that schools are now more satisfied with the support they receive for literacy than at the time of the previous inspection. Primary and special schools rate it as good and secondary schools judge it to be satisfactory.

Priority 2: to improve standards in oracy

59. The LEA included improving support for oracy as a priority after becoming aware, through its own monitoring and through analysing OFSTED school inspection reports, that there were significant weaknesses in the speaking and listening skills of pupils across the borough. The work undertaken, and planned, is wide ranging. Although it is too soon to see tangible results, the progress in this area is good. The LEA has identified that it lacks expertise in assessing oracy and has taken appropriate steps to ensure that inspectors, initially, and then others, receive training.

60. As is to be expected, much of the support in this area is focused on the early and primary years. Such projects as 'It's good to talk' and 'Talk, think, write' are encouraging oracy and linking it with writing. Developments are now beginning to influence teaching strategies in Year 7. This is happening as a result of training in the use of 'circle time' which encourages pupils, in turn, to talk and listen. A number of staff in those secondary schools involved in the project speak positively about the influence of training and the ways in which teaching strategies are now being examined and modified in order to give greater prominence to the interaction between pupils and teachers.

Priority 3: to improve standards in numeracy

61. This priority's four activity strands are appropriate, logically programmed and are rightly focused on raising mathematical attainment. Progress is satisfactory.

62. Since the formulation of the EDP and the implementation of the numeracy strategy, attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has remained in line with that found in similar LEAs and nationally. Key Stage 2 attainment remains below that found nationally or in LEAs with similar characteristics but, overall, the rate of improvement is in line. Aspects of the strategy relating to schools receiving intensive support, have been introduced satisfactorily and monitored appropriately.

63. Progress in developing home-school links has been satisfactory but there has been some slippage in meeting the time demands for some aspects of this activity. This has been due, in part, to the loss of one of the lead officers. However, the joint work in early years literacy and numeracy, as part of the 'Share' project, is a strong feature and indications are that there will be positive outcomes. There has been a useful start to the support work for minority ethnic pupils but the outcomes have not been shared widely. Pilot work in two primary schools has produced mathematical resource materials that

are being used to develop basic numeracy skills for pupils for whom English is an additional language. This work is a useful supplement to the work of the strategy.

64. Progress in raising standards at Key Stage 3 has been slow, as a result of the LEA experiencing difficulties in recruiting a co-ordinator at the beginning of the summer term 2000. However, this appointment is now in place and the early signs are encouraging.

Priority 4: to improve standards and capability in ICT

65. The updated EDP has four appropriate ICT activities that address weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report and recent national initiatives. The specialist ICT adviser is the named lead officer responsible for most aspects of the work. This wide range of responsibilities does not adequately cover the full scope of some of the activities set out in support of the priority. For example, activity 1, implement and monitor the effectiveness of the LEA strategy for ICT, links closely with recent work to co-ordinate ICT at LEA and corporate level. It would, therefore, be reasonable to expect a greater involvement from other senior officers within the authority in leading these developments.

66. There has been variable, but at least satisfactory, progress, across the four activity strands. A draft strategy for ICT has been circulated to schools. It is too early to judge whether this will result in a common information system that is both accessible and easily understood by users throughout the authority, but key questions are now being asked, and answers sought, that relate more specifically to the ICT needs of schools. Consultation groups have also been formed at corporate, directorate and school level to ensure full representation of all those involved with ICT usage. This is a sound structure that is making satisfactory use of the available expertise.

67. Satisfactory progress is also being made in the support for ICT in the curriculum. Recent courses have been held in literacy and numeracy as an aid to emphasising the use of ICT as part of these strategies. This is both timely and appropriate, but it is too early to judge the impact of this work upon teaching and learning. Some useful developmental work has begun in sharing best practice through a termly newsletter and trial materials for use in the early years curriculum. Satisfactory support materials, covering all National Curriculum subjects, have been produced to help teachers increase their subject knowledge and increase their understanding of how to use ICT to support the curriculum. However, the continuing professional development programme does not reflect the use of ICT across the broad curriculum.

68. Progress in relation to national and local ICT initiatives has been satisfactory. Despite technical problems, beyond the control of the LEA, all but two schools are now linked to the National Grid for Learning. The LEA has begun discussions about collaborative work with the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Broad Band Project. (See also the references to ICT in Section 1).

Priority 5: to raise achievement in line with the LEA's targets particularly at GCSE level through challenging under-performance in schools, ensuring rigorous approaches to target setting and data analysis and improving teaching

69. The most urgent challenge which is faced by the LEA and its schools continues to be the need to improve standards of attainment in secondary schools and increase the post-16 participation rate.

70. The LEA and schools recognise the need to raise attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 if post-16 participation rates are to increase. This is reported as being given the highest priority. This profile as top priority is not demonstrated clearly enough by the priorities and activities in the EDP. The priority does not focus clearly or exclusively on secondary education and improving post-16 participation, but includes a large number of activities. They are not mapped throughout the EDP to demonstrate clearly the components of the strategy and the important relationships which exist between them. The development of these initiatives is not sufficiently strategic, coherent or evaluated. Efforts are not focused enough on those of greatest priority. Moreover, the impact on some initiatives is likely to be reduced because they are superimposed on structures, policies and practices that are inherently weak. A startling example of this is that initiatives to improve careers guidance are being developed within circumstances where pupils in a small number of schools do not know of the range of post-16 options which are open to them.

Priority 6: to improve pupils' participation in learning through increasing attendance, improving behaviour and motivation, reducing exclusions, ensuring a relevant curriculum, supporting disaffected pupils and providing good levels of challenge to pupils with SEN, including the most able

71. This is a complex priority, which is essentially about promoting greater educational and social inclusion. It provides the framework for tackling all obstacles in the way of increased access to learning. It also focuses on improving behaviour and motivation, reducing exclusions, supporting children in public care and securing improvement in curricular provision for children with special educational needs.

72. The first inspection found that the need to increase the staying on rate into school sixth forms and further education colleges did not receive the emphasis it should in the EDP, given the present low post-16 participation rate. A number of different initiatives to increase participation have been promoted but these have not resulted in the development of a satisfactory, specific programme to increase post-16 participation.

73. Although the priority is complex, it is generally coherent. It originally had twelve supporting activities, now refocused to nine. Some of these activities have been re-titled and in all cases their content is sharper and more relevant, giving clearer direction to the overall approach and providing the basis for more effective targets. Progress towards the targets is sound but there is still some way to go to improve the attendance of pupils at secondary schools and reduce the number of pupils permanently excluded from secondary schools. The supporting activities vary from poor (review of post-16) to effective (improve opportunities for pupils whose circumstances may hinder participation in learning) which includes sound developments in relation to children in public care, proactive work with Traveller families to increase participation, and support for schoolgirl mothers and pregnant schoolgirls. With the exception of increasing post-16

participation in education, the actions in the priority are appropriate and work on them is securing satisfactory progress.

Priority 7: to improve the quality of school leadership, management and governance

74. The EDP activities cover the broad spectrum expected under this heading and progress is satisfactory overall. The developments in the support for governance are excellent.

75. Several successful strategies have been introduced to encourage attendance of senior staff on national leadership courses, and the take up rate from the primary, secondary and special sectors is healthy. As a result of consultation with those headteachers who had undertaken the leadership programme for serving headteachers, and rated it highly, the LEA created a follow up course which has been well received.

76. The guidance on the selection and appointment of senior staff in schools has now been implemented and is resulting in improved procedures. Governors are better informed than they were previously and have received help in analysing application forms and comparing the content with the criteria for selection.

77. Additionally, the LEA has continued to develop its own support programme for senior school managers. A secondary headteachers' forum has been established and, following lengthy planning, the first training day was held in January 2001. All secondary headteachers attended and the vast majority have welcomed it and rated it highly. The focus was on raising standards and this too, for a number of headteachers, has confirmed the LEA's commitment to working with them to support school improvement in order that pupils' attainment across the secondary phase improves. Schools acknowledge a significant shift in the LEA's thinking and the nature of its work with them. This is an important step forward for the LEA, but one which comes late in the day.

78. Support for primary and special school headteachers and deputies continues to develop and is appreciated by schools. Close links have been forged with the South Yorkshire Leadership College, and the Universities of Hull and Leeds, which are resulting in school managers having a suitably broad range of management and leadership training opportunities from which to select.

79. Training to support schools to become self-evaluative is good. The LEA has rightly modified the OFSTED self-evaluation training materials to meet its specific needs. This has resulted in a bespoke development programme which has improved the knowledge and skills of those taking part. There has been a large demand for training and its quality, according to those who have participated, is very good. The LEA, aware of the need for such training for secondary school middle managers, modified appropriately the training materials to meet their needs. A number of senior and middle managers who had undertaken the training indicated how monitoring and evaluation practices in schools had changed as a result of the course. They indicated also that they are more aware than previously of their own school's strengths and weaknesses. Plans are underway to modify the training materials to meet the needs of senior staff in special schools. The LEA has not yet considered what headteachers and

senior school managers are able to contribute to their data and governors' knowledge as a result of becoming more self-evaluative.

80. The recruitment of governors has been radically overhauled. No longer are political appointments made to governing bodies, but all prospective governors must apply for the positions and meet three criteria: to be able to make school visits; to undertake training; and to reflect LEA policy in their work. This is a bold initiative and one which is reaping rewards in the quality of the governors now serving. Schools and governors have a high regard for the training and the support which they receive. Many of the governors interviewed spoke knowledgeably about their schools and the issues facing them, and a number voiced their concerns about the weighty responsibilities they carry. They indicated that, without the robust support of the LEA, they would be neither able nor willing to govern.

81. While the progress has been satisfactory overall, there are weaknesses in the over-riding strategy which consolidates the activities into a coherent whole and emphasises how work in this area will result in school improvement and raised achievement.

Recommendations:

In order to help schools improve further and raise standards:

- ensure that the activities related to improving school management are clearly focused on school improvement and raising attainment;
- ensure that all headteachers receive training in self-evaluation; and
- consult with schools and decide how they can use self-evaluation as a tool for:
 - improving the data available on their progress and performance for their governors and the LEA; and
 - use the data arising from self-evaluation to improve quality and raise standards.

SECTION 3: OTHER ASPECTS OF SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Support for headteachers of secondary schools

82. The first inspection found that very few of the authority's inspectors had experience and expertise in the senior management of secondary schools. Those with secondary expertise were sometimes not available to the secondary schools in the pyramid they supported because of commitments to the primary schools. The inspection report recommended that there should be better, expert support for headteachers of secondary schools.

83. Satisfactory progress has been made in implementing this recommendation although weaknesses remain. The evolution of the management development forum, which is seen as a major contributor to work in this area is still at an early stage. The programme of support to headteachers is now satisfactory and fairly comprehensive in its entirety, although aspects, in particular the role of the pyramid inspector, continue to have weaknesses. The principles for providing support are not always clear and the deployment is not always sufficiently strategic. These weaknesses are in the organisation and deployment of support rather than in its accessibility or provision. Current plans do not entirely rectify the weaknesses.

84. Inspectors experienced in the primary and secondary phase are still deployed to pyramids of schools, but they have a diminished role. In order to ensure the best use of the specialist skills of a relatively small team, the inspectors are divided into three specialist teams for monitoring literacy, numeracy and target setting. Nevertheless, the pyramid inspector continues to monitor the schools' progress in implementing the school development plan, and provides additional support through the service level agreement with schools.

85. There are plans to develop the role of pyramid inspector further by introducing an annual review of performance with schools. The actual programme of visits provided by inspectors as part of centrally retained funding is not sufficiently coherent. It is, given the context in Doncaster, realistic and practical to provide specialist monitoring teams, but the way in which the target setting visit interrelates with the scrutiny and monitoring of the school development plan and how duplication will be avoided in future between the target setting visit and the annual review of school performance have not been sufficiently clearly established. Hence the support, challenge and monitoring provided to the different management processes of target setting, development planning and school review can become fragmented. None of the monitoring visits or future plans for development take sufficient account of the need to deploy support in relation to school needs and effectiveness.

86. Secondary headteachers, however, report that they value the contribution of the pyramid inspector. Their examples of the support provided vary in effectiveness. Support, which is directed at ensuring better liaison between primary and secondary schools, is, in some instances, a particular strength. Nevertheless, some examples seem to add little to what the school can effectively do for itself. The principles whereby schools are autonomous and responsible for their own self improvement, while the LEA continues to monitor and challenge, are not sufficiently clearly articulated.

87. The LEA has not found an opportunity to enhance the skills of the team of inspectors by appointing more staff with secondary senior management expertise, although secondments have been considered and discounted. The majority of the current team of inspectors have secondary experience but only two at senior management level and none has been a secondary headteacher. In common with the national picture, the differential salary level is the most significant inhibiting factor. Nevertheless, the LEA has sought to make good any shortage by brokering support from consultants and in that process has been successful in obtaining for schools the necessary specialist expertise. While valuable, the approach is still ad hoc. These developments make a good basis for a more systematic approach.

88. The LEA has devised a clear framework for senior management development but it does not sufficiently cover induction although arrangements are made as required. The LEA has recently established a management development forum which focuses on improvement strategies and the dissemination of good practice. This is one of the productive outcomes of the valuable partnership with Warwickshire LEA.

Support for target-setting

89. At the time of the first inspection the LEA had provided guidance and training on target-setting. However, the inspectors on target-setting visits did not offer consistent challenge to the schools nor did their visits prompt schools to define the changes which were required in order to achieve the targets. The inspection report recommended that there should be a common approach among inspectors in their work with schools on target-setting to ensure that the targets of all schools were appropriately challenging.

90. The LEA has made very good progress in responding to this recommendation and support for target-setting is good. Primary and secondary schools are provided with a suitable range of data. Detailed, clear and well-presented written guidance has been circulated. It promotes a rigorous and comprehensive method of target setting for pupils in primary and secondary schools. Appropriate training courses have been provided.

91. A small team of inspectors visits schools to discuss the targets which have been set. Paired visits to secondary schools have been valuable in ensuring a consistent approach, although such pairing should not be required in future. The visits are planned carefully, and include a comprehensive discussion about the performance of pupils in each school. Areas for general school improvement and the strategy which is required to meet the targets are also discussed although this could profitably be more closely linked with pyramid inspectors' scrutiny and discussion of the progress on school development plans.

92. A *pro forma* is used to record the findings of the visit, which enables good practice as well as schools' difficulties to be recorded on a database for follow-up. Secondary headteachers in particular report that the visit was helpful and challenging.

93. There has been an improvement in the extent to which schools are prepared to set challenging targets. If the targets which have been set are met, there will be a substantial improvement in standards of attainment. Aggregated schools' targets at GCSE and in numeracy now exceed the LEA's targets and aggregated schools' literacy targets are within one per cent of the LEA's target.

Alternative sources of support

94. The previous inspection found that the quality assurance division's consultancy package was valued by primary schools in particular but that some secondary schools perceived an unevenness in the quality of the provision. The report recommended that schools should be provided with a quality-controlled register of alternative sources of consultancy, advice and evaluation.

95. Work on this recommendation is good: it has been well focused and effective. The first draft of the register was issued in the spring of 2000 and included a list of the external consultants used by the LEA. During the following term schools were invited to consider the list and submit the names of consultants whom they regarded as suitable. As a result, a more comprehensive list was issued in September 2000. Through discussion with schools, nearby LEAs and further and higher education establishments, as well as from information held internally, the LEA has validated the work of providers and ensured that any doubts about the quality were resolved before inclusion. Work on updating and refining the register is continuing to enable re-issue later in the year.

Support for schools with priorities for improvement

96. At the time of the previous inspection two schools, one primary and one secondary, were subject to special measures. These schools have since been removed from this category. One school had been found to have serious weaknesses prior to the first inspection of the LEA. There are now five schools with serious weaknesses, four of which were placed in this category following OFSTED inspections in the autumn term 2000. There is one under achieving primary school identified by OFSTED.

97. The previous report recommended that work should be extended to schools not so far identified as causing concern but failing to secure improvement in attendance and/or test and examination results. The LEA extended its policy and practices to include a new category of schools with priorities for improvement to include those failing to secure improvement in attendance and attainment. Progress in this work has been good. The categories of schools, the criteria for placement, details of information flow and standard operating procedures are very clearly set out in the policy issued to schools in October 2000 after full consultation. The LEA has established an electronic database which, when appropriate information is fed in, should identify those schools whose performance is below benchmark. Schools understand the systems and how they work in practice. The range and quality of support for schools once identified, as schools with priorities for improvement (SPI) are good. However, the new systems for early identification and support are not working effectively, as is shown by the number of schools now in serious weaknesses which had either not been identified by the LEA or not supported appropriately. The outcomes of support in this area and its impact upon schools are therefore, unsatisfactory.

Support for self-evaluation

98. The previous report indicated that schools had not had enough support to become self-evaluating and recommended that the LEA should provide more support in this area. Satisfactory progress has been made, and many senior managers are now skilled in carrying out evaluation of their own schools and departments. This support has been provided under EDP priority 7 and is described earlier in this report.

The 14-19 curriculum

99. At the time of the first inspection, the low attainment of pupils aged 16 and the low rate of post-16 participation illustrated the considerable problems faced by the LEA in the area of 14-19 curriculum and provision. The LEA had appointed an education inspector with a specific responsibility for the 14-19 curriculum. Despite the implementation of major national projects, significant work was required to improve the quality and relevance of the curriculum and students' standards of attainment.

100. Some significant developments have taken place in implementing this recommendation, but the improvements are insufficient and provision remains unsatisfactory overall. Many of the developments have been competently led by the 14-19 inspector who has worked exceedingly hard but has many and diverse responsibilities. Some developments require participation of a wider range of inspectors and advisers. Although there has been improvement, there are still major strategic weaknesses particularly in the breadth of the curriculum in schools with small sixth forms and in fostering better collaboration and liaison. These are explained in detail in the OFSTED inspection report on the area wide 16-19 inspection (March 2001).

101. A key improvement is the development of a policy for 14-19 education which at the time of the inspection was ready to be launched formally. The policy has been the subject of widespread consultation. It states in very broad terms, principles, entitlement, framework and targets which are unexceptional. Its usefulness is weakened because it is not accompanied with any guidance which spells out clearly the implications of the policy or how it could be used as a tool for self-evaluation to measure compliance. Nor is it accompanied by a clear plan for implementation. However, the LEA intends that a review of current provision will be carried out in order to establish future action.

102. A good range of developments was planned to respond to the recommendation. Schools have received appropriate and informative training on curricular developments 14-19. Improvements have also been made in the number of schools offering GNVQ courses and in the development of key skills. There has been an increase in the number of schools which are able to offer GNVQ qualifications. However, no collaborative arrangements exist for the planning, teaching and accommodating of different courses between schools to enable efficient use of resources and expertise. The college of further education jointly plans, accommodates and teaches GNVQ courses with schools but only three schools have taken up this opportunity this year. However, there are a number of collaborative activities, particularly in ICT, between schools and the college of further education.

103. Good progress has also been made on developing a suitable pre-vocational alternative for pupils who struggle to complete successfully their secondary education. Some useful guidance has also been produced on disapplication of students who are

unlikely to complete successfully their secondary education. Ninety students attend a programme which includes access to programmes of study which are taught at the college. A helpful evaluation of the project has usefully identified recommendations for further development.

Support for school budgeting

104. The previous inspection report recommended that urgent action should be taken to assist those schools with deficit budgets to recover by producing an agreed, formalised action plan.

105. Progress in responding to this recommendation has been good overall. The number and size of budget deficits have been reduced. Mechanisms are now in place to ensure that all schools with anticipated deficits of a significant amount have secure recovery plans in place and schools receive regular monitoring visits. There is an agreed note of the visit, although there is no guarantee that these reports are shared with governors and this remains a weakness. Budget deficits are one of two financial indicators reflecting past performance which are currently incorporated into the authority's monitoring of school performance.

106. Budget surpluses have increased in aggregate by 36 per cent over the past two years. The education and culture board has received a report on the pattern of surpluses and appropriately reduced the size of the surplus requiring formal challenge from 15 per cent to ten per cent.

107. The previous inspection reported that governing bodies were not supplied with financial data and recommended that they should have regular access to budget monitoring data. This recommendation is being implemented satisfactorily and the authority has plans to continue to improve the quality of the information available to governors. Currently chairs of governors receive directly each month the same budget monitoring statement as headteachers which is generated from the council's central finance system. This is a useful prompt although it is of limited use in assisting in budget monitoring since it excludes committed expenditure. However, the local authority now ensures that each full governing body meeting has an agenda item dealing with budget monitoring and this subject is also covered in the termly governor forum meetings. The local authority intends to use the termly briefings of clerks to governors to monitor progress. Budget monitoring is also a strengthened item in the programme for governor training.

108. In addition to the monthly monitoring statements, the local authority is introducing guidance to headteachers about the format for reporting on budget progress at school level. This is to be fully in place in the spring term and will be accompanied by further training opportunities.

Recommendations:

To improve the support to secondary school headteachers:

- clarify the role of the pyramid inspector and develop greater coherence and consistency in the monitoring carried out by different inspectors;
- ensure that support and monitoring are more clearly matched to the effectiveness of different schools; and
- in consultation with headteachers, identify those aspects of support and consultancy which realistically and expertly can be provided by the LEA, and formulate clearly the criteria and the support which needs to be contracted from external sources.

In order to identify those schools which are in danger of failing to offer their pupils a satisfactory quality of education:

- ensure that the procedures which have been devised are focused more closely on identifying weaknesses; and
- provide rigorous support and challenge to those schools with identified weaknesses in order to help them improve.

In order to expedite work on improving attainment and increasing post-16 participation:

- develop guidance to complement the 14-19 curriculum policy which schools can use to evaluate their compliance with the policy; and
- promote better use of collaboration between schools in developing effective and efficient curricular provision for students 14-19.

In order to plan strategically for improvements in the provision for pupils aged 14-19:

- develop a clear strategic plan for the development of the structure and provision of 14-19 education which is based on the need to raise attainment, improve participation and develop an effective curriculum for pupils aged 14-19.

In order to ensure that governors of schools which have agreed deficits are involved fully and aware of their schools' financial performance and the authority's assessment of progress:

- supply the chairs of governors with notes of visits made to their schools.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

The special educational needs service

109. The previous inspection found weaknesses in a number of aspects of the LEA's implementation of its strategy for special educational needs (SEN). In particular, the role of the LEA's teaching support service; the role and intake of the special schools; and the time spent by educational psychologists in school. Since the inspection, restructuring of the special educational needs section has taken place and a new SEN manager has been appointed. The SEN policy, which has been revised, reflects a stronger emphasis on inclusion, and a special educational needs consultation group has been established. An excellent newsletter has been launched which deals with SEN and wider inclusion issues. Progress has been satisfactory overall, although weaknesses remain in strategic planning.

110. In relation to the recommendation which indicated that there should be a clearer role for the teaching support service, progress has been made in reorganising it into two sections: the integrated learning support service which is provided on a traded basis to schools, and the specialist education and development team which provides support to pupils with low incidence needs. The latter also includes a newly appointed team of four teachers to monitor the schools' use of delegated funds and work developmentally with schools. The changes have given the support services a clearer focus, and have been generally well received by schools. It is, however, too early to see the full impact of the changes. There are currently no planned evaluations to assess the impact of the changes or any further planned developments. The changes are not an end point but a stage in a longer process of enabling schools to take greater responsibility for special educational needs together with a further delegation of funds. The extent to which all those involved understand and support this view, at this stage, is limited.

111. Good developments are taking place: for example, performance data analysed alongside SEN data; the emerging strategy for monitoring SEN provision; the growing use of 'P scales' in mainstream schools; and the tentative moves towards self-evaluation by special educational needs co-ordinators. These developments, though, are not yet contributing to the strategy for SEN or linked sufficiently to progress on meeting targets. The authority has achieved a significant reduction in the rate of statements being produced but the figures are still well above the national and regional averages.

112. The SEN services development plan has provided useful guidance in the short-term, and is cross-referenced very well to the EDP. There is an intention to produce a much more detailed document by April 2001 which would encompass a longer time scale. There is a pressing need for a longer-term strategic approach, in particular, a reduction in the number of statements as a result of more effective early intervention for pupils.

Special school provision

113. The previous inspection was critical of the lack of clarity about the role and function of the special schools and the formula for funding the schools. Overall, satisfactory progress has been made in tackling the recommendation. In particular, a special school headteacher has been seconded to conduct a review of special school

provision. The approach has a number of weaknesses. Although the LEA has taken a very open consultative approach, there are neither terms of reference nor a specific brief other than to produce a number of options for change by April 2001. The approach has been greatly welcomed by the headteachers. However, strategy is weak and the plans lack clarity. At present this work is in process and there is no indication of possible outcomes. Headteachers are committed firmly to the need for change which is long overdue. The link project between special and mainstream schools, funded by the Standards Fund, has been a good opportunity for schools to explore opportunities to work together. Lessons learned from this are already informing the special school review.

114. Funding in special schools is low in comparison with the national average and the LEA has acknowledged, for some time, the need to review the formula. It has made some short term adjustments to the funding of schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, but substantive work on funding is not set to start until April 2001. This time scale has not been well considered and work will start at the same time as a paper is written setting out the options for special schools which will need to include costings. It is likely that progress in deciding on an option and implementing it will be slowed down as a result. Some headteachers have considerable concerns about this.

The educational psychology service

115. The final recommendation in the SEN section of the previous inspection concerned increasing the amount of time made available to schools from the educational psychology service. The LEA took appropriate action to increase the proportion of educational psychologists' time spent in schools, but this has not resulted in increased time in school because, as the allocation of time increased, Doncaster, like many LEAs, experienced difficulties with the recruitment of educational psychologists.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the planning of, and provision for, special educational needs:

- develop and implement a detailed strategic plan for SEN that is designed to achieve strategic objectives that are clearly stated and capable of being evaluated; and
- continue to seek to increase the educational psychologist time allocated to schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The provision of school places

116. The previous inspection report recommended that speedy action should be taken to implement the proposals set out in the school organisation plan to remove surplus places, particularly in primary schools, and so improve value for money.

117. Doncaster has made satisfactory progress although weaknesses in planning have the potential to constrain further developments. The LEA has completed reviews of primary provision within three pyramids and the consequent removal of surplus places will facilitate the recycling of resources within the Individual Schools Budget. School reorganisations will be implemented in September 2001 which will involve four closures, the establishment of one new school, the enlargement of one school and an increase in school-based nursery provision. As a result of this action, primary surplus places will be reduced to 15 per cent in 2001/02 and the local authority has set a target of ten per cent by 2003/04. This target has not been incorporated into the school organisation plan. Headteachers of the schools involved acknowledge the quality of the management of the process after some initial difficulties.

118. The school organisation plan has weaknesses. It does not address the extent to which school performance might be taken into account when considering proposals to add or to remove places. The local authority has indicated that it has deliberately excluded considerations of standards and quality. Too little consideration has been given to post-16 places. This approach is unsatisfactory. Elsewhere, although the authority has an agreed policy on the optimum size for primary schools, this does not appear in the plan, nor is there any reference to secondary school size. There is a potential confusion between the roles of the education and culture board and the school organisation committee.

119. The school organisation committee has been particularly active in familiarising itself with local issues. It meets regularly and has scheduled a series of visits to clusters to receive the views of heads, governors and local members with a view to determine future areas for review. Although some parties will undoubtedly welcome the opportunity to put views to a decision-making body in advance of the formulation of any proposals, there is necessarily an absence of separation between planning and scrutiny in this approach. This might provide the basis for challenge to the committee's subsequent objectivity as a decision-making body voting on the school organisation plan prepared by the local authority and determining statutory proposals arising from it.

Post-16 provision

120. At the time of the first inspection the LEA had not developed a policy for 16-19 provision. There were many small sixth forms, many teaching groups were too small, results were low and the system was costly. The inspection report recommended that post-16 provision should be rationalised so as to avoid the problems created by small sixth forms.

121. Poor progress has been made in both planning and action to implement this recommendation. The development of post-16 provision continues to be much in need of high quality strategic planning and leadership. This recommendation also forms a

necessary foundation for effective progress in improving standards; securing an effective curriculum and increasing participation at post-16. Progress on these recommendations should have placed the LEA in a sound position for the area wide inspection conducted by OFSTED, which took place in autumn 2000. Despite the recommendations of the first OFSTED report, the issues facing the LEA which are set out in the area wide 16-19 report are considerable and extensive.

122. The LEA interpreted this recommendation too narrowly in terms of reducing the number of sixth forms rather than using it as a way of improving standards, the quality of the curriculum and improving post-16 participation. A paper for consultation was circulated to schools and stakeholders in March 2000. Although it made reference to the difficulties of low standards and inadequate participation in post-16 education, it did not provide sufficient leadership to encourage partners to consider the issues in a productive way. It also failed to convey a sufficient sense of the urgency or to signal the importance of seeking solutions to the problems. As a result, the response to consultation was poor both in numbers and in quality. Responses were largely confined to seeking comparatively minor modifications to the current system and expressed a wish to leave much of it untouched. The paper also largely dismissed, at an early stage, the benefits of consortium arrangements.

123. Following this, there was little further consultation or involvement with schools in developing proposals until in September 2000. A proposal to close the three smallest sixth forms was circulated. This proposal received little assent and promoted considerable controversy. The proposals were narrow in their scope and were based on a limited exploration of significant factors such as transport, course provision and its quality. If implemented, an opportunity would have been missed to develop provision which had the capacity to achieve the improvements in standards and curricular provision which are required across all secondary schools in the borough.

124. LEA officers and schools feel strongly that the negative response to this proposal has been turned to a force for the good. Participants now accept that the *status quo* is not an option and there is greater willingness to work together to seek solutions. The LEA now plans to set up a consultative group within the auspices of the learning partnership to develop new proposals which will also take into account the findings of OFSTED's 16-19 area-wide review.

125. The approach to a recent decision of the education and culture board, which was subsequently not implemented, to contribute to balancing its budget by withdrawing post-16 discretionary transport, without apparent notice or consultation, was unsatisfactory. The committee paper proposing the cut implied that the new education maintenance allowance is a substitute for free transport, which it is not, and failed critically to link the issue to post-16 participation.

Support for attendance

126. At the time of the previous inspection, overall levels of attendance were below national averages and in the case of secondary schools well below. The report noted a slight improvement in 1998/99. It also noted unauthorised absence from secondary schools as doubling between 1995 and 1998. Despite some improvement in specific aspects of the education welfare service, it had not yet succeeded in helping schools tackle attendance problems. It recommended that an assessment should be made of

the resource implications of the broad scope of the work of the education welfare service, in order to ensure that it was able to meet fully the LEA's commitment to improving attendance.

127. Since the previous inspection, there has been a slight improvement in attendance in both phases, but attendance in secondary schools remains stubbornly well below the national average. Unauthorised absence from primary schools in the same year (1999/00) was at the national average but the figure for secondary schools remained well above the national average, although there is evidence that the figures for unauthorised absence result from greater rigour and more consistency in definitions of authorised absence. The LEA and the schools have undertaken a fundamental review of approaches to attendance and introduced changes which have the potential to lead to improvement.

128. The use of school and LEA attendance panels as well as the development and funding of attendance support assistants in key areas are directly helping schools to deal with attendance problems. There has been an effective service reorganisation and a full refocusing of service activity, which command the support of all headteachers consulted. Organisational and structural changes are effective.

129. The increased sharpness in tackling attendance issues and the developing guidance for schools on improving standards observed during the previous inspection have been fully sustained and indeed developed. The guidance provided in the attendance handbook is good and the entire approach to change, involving as it did direct discussion and negotiation with the schools, has resulted in systems which not only command general support but also provide the basis for sustainable improvement. The service database, the service level agreements with schools, the negotiated developments of individual school targets and school attendance policies all represent improvements in practice. Overall, provision is satisfactory.

Support for Traveller children

130. The previous inspection report acknowledged the appropriate deployment of the education welfare service to work with Traveller children. However, it identified that a large number of, especially secondary age, Traveller children were not registered at school. This resulted in a recommendation that the LEA should improve the registration of Traveller children.

131. The LEA's response to this recommendation has been well considered and has secured some general improvements in a difficult area. Problems with the registration and attendance of Traveller children, particularly those of secondary school age, are acute and not confined to Doncaster. The LEA sensibly has taken the view that it must try to engage the parents of all Traveller children and has started by securing important improvements in the early years and the primary stage. There has been an improvement of about 20 per cent in pupils registered and attending school. There has been a slight increase in the numbers of secondary age pupils registered, but retaining their attendance is proving a challenge.

132. The service has been reorganised and is developing very useful links through home-school liaison work with schools which have significant expertise and experience, activity at a family centre, and by introducing a three stage package into school at both

primary and secondary levels. There is effective curricular and welfare oversight of all arrangements including education by tutors, and there is no hesitation about using recourse to the courts where appropriate. Work on the recommendation is never less than satisfactory.

Support for behaviour

133. The previous inspection judged the LEA's provision for excluded pupils to have a number of weaknesses. The main reasons were that the Key Stage 3 pupil referral unit had a long waiting list, there was no separate specialist provision for emotionally or behaviourally disturbed pupils, and there was insufficient resource provision in mainstream secondary schools. These factors limited the LEA's capacity to support children with behaviour problems appropriately. The report therefore recommended that the shortage of pupil referral unit places at Key Stage 3 should be remedied, if alternative forms of appropriate provision were not made.

134. There has been a clear effort to improve the position in pupil referral units to the extent that provision now is substantially full time. In addition, the improvements noted for Year 11 pupils through wider curriculum experiences in further education, work experience and opportunities provided by voluntary organisations have been sustained. At the time of the last inspection the Key Stage 3 pupil referral unit had 30 full-time permanently excluded pupils on roll and a further 30 on the waiting list. The LEA has never had specialist support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) or enhanced provision in mainstream apart from an arrangement by which the three specialist schools catering for pupils with moderate learning difficulties had, at the time of the previous inspection, five places each for emotionally or behaviourally disturbed pupils. This figure has been expanded to eight places at each.

135. In total the LEA maintains 109 statements of EBD and the majority of these pupils are either in mainstream or in the places at specialist schools mentioned above. However, there are as many as 20 in pupil referral units. Although there has been some discussion of further specialist EBD provision, both within the LEA and in consultation with two other nearby LEAs, there has been no formal consideration. It would be sensible, in the light of the imminent review of special educational provision, for the LEA to ensure that this possibility receives formal consideration.

136. There are now pupil referral unit places in Year 7 which are being used to provide respite to avoid exclusion and, in Year 8, the waiting list consists of only three pupils none of whom is permanently excluded. There remain problems with Year 9 but these are gradually being tackled to reduce the number that will need to transfer to the Year 10 pupil referral unit and to increase the number of those returning to mainstream schools. Time out of mainstream school has been reduced for permanently excluded pupils and the current return rate is just under 60 per cent.

137. The previous report also identified that some pupils were out of school for several terms while awaiting a place at another school or at a pupil referral unit. It commended the LEA's intention to extend tuition hours through a further recommendation that the plans to increase the amount of home tuition provided for pupils out of school should be implemented as soon as possible.

138. There has been some minor improvement in hours so far and the overall current level of education provided by the LEA to excluded pupils is 12 hours on average. This comprises a variation from as little as five hours in a few cases to full-time provision in pupil referral units. The LEA's approach to the recommendation has, appropriately, been focused not just on home tuition but on all types of alternative provision for excluded pupils in light of the Secretary of State's requirement for full time education by 2002. Proposals were approved in principle by the education and culture board in November 2000, subject to confirmation at a meeting to be held in January 2001. The effect of these proposals will result in an increase to 15 hours a week from April 2001 and to 20 hours from September 2001, with a final increase to 25 hours from April 2002.

139. Discussion with headteachers confirms the view that the recommendations, and their implications, are being firmly and seriously tackled, that progress on both recommendations has been sustained and that provision is now satisfactory.

140. The previous inspection found that Doncaster's secondary schools were, overall, high excluders of pupils – permanent exclusions from Doncaster secondary schools had been more than twice the national average. The behaviour support plan was weak in a number of respects, there was no comprehensive system of preventative support and the LEA's strategy to support schools while good, was still being developed. The report recommended that the behaviour support plan should be revised to achieve consistency with the Education Development Plan and to provide more detail about the provision made or planned.

141. The behaviour support plan has been rewritten and is almost at final draft stage. It is a significant improvement on its predecessor, providing an effective framework for current activity and planned development. It has built well upon the progress made through further revision of the Education Development Plan and addresses the needs identified in the recommendation.

142. Work on developing teachers' skills of behaviour management has improved significantly and the use of forums such as the social inclusion group and the pupil issues group, both of which include school representatives, are contributing effectively to the development of LEA policy. Two additional learning support units, funded under Standards Fund 24b, are supplementing the work of learning support units at ten of the secondary schools in piloting transfers of pupils from pupil referral units back into mainstream.

143. Two years ago permanent exclusions were reduced by over one third on the previous year. Last year, the number of permanent exclusions again reduced but only slightly and, in the secondary sector was still in excess of national figures. This year, so far, there are signs of significant reduction and headteachers who were consulted indicated that the improvement is real and related to a wide variety of initiatives promoted through school-LEA co-operation. Fourteen of the 17 secondary schools buy into the social inclusion team, a multi-disciplinary group of teachers, youth workers and social inclusion officers with counselling skills, to increasingly positive effect. Progress in this area is at least satisfactory.

Combating racism

144. The LEA is making a sound response to combating racism. The Macpherson report, 1999, recommended that LEAs should establish procedures for reporting racist incidents. The council has been operating a racist incident reporting form for a number of years. Monitoring of racial incidents is dealt with corporately, but the LEA is considering how systems within the education service can be improved. A draft racial equality policy has been drawn up by the LEA which has been closely aligned to the Commission for Racial Equality's 'Learning for All' guidance.

Social inclusion

145. The previous inspection observed that the LEA took steps to meet its statutory responsibility in this area apart from being insufficiently vigorous in ensuring that all Traveller pupils were registered at school and in providing a school or pupil referral unit place more speedily for some excluded pupils. Moreover, support to improve attendance was providing poor value. No direct recommendation was provided. All these issues have been tackled by the LEA since then. Although the levels of success have inevitably varied, the effect of this work has been to secure progress which is not less than satisfactory. In addition, EDP Priority 6 has been significantly improved and is securing increased coherence and focus in relation to the major aspects of tackling social exclusion. Work in all appropriate areas such as exclusions, behaviour support, attendance, children in public care, Traveller children and liaison with other departments and agencies has improved since the previous inspection and is now generally satisfactory.

Excellence in Cities

146. The LEA and its secondary schools have welcomed Excellence in Cities (EiC) which they see as linking with the fifth and sixth priority of the EDP. Plans for the introduction of EiC in September 2001 are at an early stage, but are progressing well. All secondary schools are involved. The LEA has established a steering group of all secondary headteachers, a special school representative and officers. Two strategy groups have been formed from members of the steering group: one with responsibility for planning the individual strategies, for example, learning mentors, learning support units and the gifted and talented strand; the second for developing criteria for the selection of specialist schools and departments. These plans are appropriate and are supported fully by schools and the LEA is, rightly, seeking to learn from the experiences of others who have established the government's EiC initiative.

Children in public care

147. At the time of the previous inspection the recent introduction of a new database was noted and recorded as a significant improvement. The report made no specific recommendation. The links between the social services and education directorates in relation to children in public care are good and there is now a fully developed joint policy which is on the point of being launched formally. The database of and reporting on these children have improved. All schools now have a designated teacher and there is a programme of joint training across the authority. Provision for children in public care is now satisfactory.

Health, safety, welfare, and child protection

148. At the time of the last inspection there was evidence of some frustration in schools about lack of clarity over action being taken by social workers for children at risk. This finding was within a context in which the strategic partnership between the social services directorate and education was broadly effective. It gave rise to a recommendation that day-to-day communication between social workers and schools should be strengthened. Since then, it has been. Performance and progress are satisfactory with few weaknesses.

149. The social services department has reorganised its service so that each of its relevant teams is linked to one of the pyramids of schools, and social services department, health authority and education boundaries are now coterminous. There has been improved joint training of representatives from the different agencies and work on the framework for the assessment of children in need and their families has also led to improvement in this area, especially through the two pilots on the framework. There are also new protocols about rates of response to referrals. Discussions with headteachers indicated that in secondary schools the position remains patchy but in the pilot areas and among primary schools generally there had been significant improvement.

Recommendations:

In order to ensure that the authority has a secure basis upon which to continue to address school place planning:

- incorporate unambiguously considerations of standards and school size in the school organisation plan; and
- review and clarify in the school organisation plan the role of the school organisation committee.

To improve standards, quality and access to educational opportunities for pupils aged 14 –19:

- develop in partnership with the secondary schools and college of further education a strategic plan for the development of 14-19 provision in Doncaster – this plan should be clearly based on a strategy for raising attainment and promoting participation and should seek to develop effective and efficient curriculum provision in line with newly formulated 14-19 curriculum policy.

In order to improve provision for pupils with behavioural problems:

- the possibility of securing specialist EBD provision should be formally considered during the course of the imminent review of special education provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to ensure that financial accounting is more transparent and that budgets are appropriately targeted to priorities:

- review the nature and structure of the Passenger Transport Authority subsidy and confirm the appropriateness of the charge to the education budget in respect of the council's policy intentions.

In order to ensure that the work of all the groups of services within the directorate contribute to achieving the council's corporate aims, improve the quality of strategic management by:

- scheduling scrutiny of major aspects of the LEA's work and those which are the focus for development;
- discontinuing the cycle of reviews of secondary schools, except for the reporting of findings from OFSTED inspections, in order to free up officers' and members' time and allow them to concentrate more on strategic and operational management;
- ensuring that strategic plans, operational plans, service plans and departmental plans are coherent and are targeted clearly on meeting the LEA's aims; and
- instituting more rigorous and effective monitoring and evaluation procedures which focus clearly on outcomes.

In order to ensure that resources are better focused on priorities:

- review the school funding formula involving both an analysis of organisational and curricular needs and the employment of appropriate indicators;
- undertake a more rigorous analysis of the authority's resource allocations within the education budget to take account of its comparative performance and outcomes, as well as challenging existing spending decisions;
- assist schools in identifying and challenging their own spending levels alongside others; and
- secure a consistent opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the process of challenging and assessing the appropriateness of the resourcing decisions for education.

In order to ensure that schools apply the principles of Best Value and there is a basis for challenge and monitoring by others:

- provide guidance and support to schools and implement the authority's own policy of requiring schools to submit a statement with their annual budget plan; and
- put in place performance management across the directorate.

In order to improve the management and communication of the asset management strategy:

- ensure that the stakeholder reference group is involved as a regular and active partner; and

- ensure that schools are clear about the role and regularity of the local authority's landlord function and that notes of visits are exchanged and recommendations for action are clear.

In order to improve the support for ICT:

- involve schools more fully in the development of administrative ICT; and
- expedite plans already in place and communicate these more clearly to schools.

In order to help schools improve further and raise standards:

- ensure that the activities related to improving school management are clearly focused on school improvement and raising attainment;
- ensure that all headteachers receive training in self-evaluation; and
- consult with schools and decide how they can use self-evaluation as a tool for:
 - improving the data available on their progress and performance for their governors and the LEA; and
 - use the data arising from self-evaluation to improve quality and raise standards.

To improve the support to secondary school headteachers:

- clarify the role of the pyramid inspector and develop greater coherence and consistency in the monitoring carried out by different inspectors;
- ensure that support and monitoring are more clearly matched to the effectiveness of different schools; and
- in consultation with headteachers, identify those aspects of support and consultancy which realistically and expertly can be provided by the LEA, and formulate clearly the criteria and the support which needs to be contracted from external sources.

In order to identify those schools which are in danger of failing to offer their pupils a satisfactory quality of education:

- ensure that the procedures which have been devised are focused more closely on identifying weaknesses; and
- provide rigorous support and challenge to those schools with identified weaknesses in order to help them improve.

In order to expedite work on improving attainment and increasing post-16 participation:

- develop guidance to complement the 14-19 curriculum policy which schools can use to evaluate their compliance with the policy; and
- promote better use of collaboration between schools in developing effective and efficient curricular provision for students 14-19.

In order to plan strategically for improvements in the provision for pupils aged 14-19:

- develop a clear strategic plan for the development of the structure and provision of 14-19 education which is based on the need to raise attainment, improve participation and develop an effective curriculum for pupils aged 14 -19.

In order to ensure that governors of schools which have agreed deficits are involved fully and aware of their schools' financial performance and the authority's assessment of progress:

- supply the chairs of governors with notes of visits made to their schools.

In order to improve the planning of, and provision for, special educational needs:

- develop and implement a detailed strategic plan for SEN that is designed to achieve strategic objectives that are clearly stated and capable of being evaluated; and
- continue to seek to increase the educational psychologist time allocated to schools.

In order to ensure that the authority has a secure basis upon which to continue to address school place planning:

- incorporate unambiguously considerations of standards and school size in the school organisation plan; and
- review and clarify in the school organisation plan the role of the school organisation committee.

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