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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments, and written submissions from the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 94 schools. The response rate was 85 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to nine primary, three secondary, two special schools and two pupil referral units (PRUs). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to school improvement and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Doncaster LEA serves a traditional coal-mining area. As the staple industries of mining and engineering declined, the area experienced severe economic recession. It is now, to some extent, emerging from that experience, but a legacy of poverty and depressed expectations, among a largely white population, remains.
5. It is important then that schools raise aspirations, and ensure that pupils achieve well. In Doncaster, until this year, which has seen some improvement, schools have not been meeting with pronounced success in raising achievement. Although at Key Stage 1, performance is broadly average, it declines thereafter. That decline continues until, at GCSE, it is well below national average and can show only one year of clear improvement. The secondary schools, in particular, are not providing the quality of education needed to combat disaffection and promote social inclusion. Exclusions have been high and attendance is poor in the secondary sector. For some years too many pupils have left school with no qualifications.
6. Confronted with this history, it would be reasonable to expect the Council to make educational standards its main priority. On paper it is not clear that this is the case. Schooling does not take a prominent place in the Council's plans for regeneration. Nevertheless, discussion with Members, officers and in the schools shows greater priority is given to raising standards than is evident in the Council's documents.

7. In the past Members have not exercised effective scrutiny of the performance of the LEA. New Members and officers face a major task in improving the LEA. Currently, planning and the evaluation of success in implementing plans are inadequate. Planning does not show how strategy is to be delivered in practice, and evaluation does not make enough use of quantifiable measures of success.

8. Nevertheless, this is an LEA in transition and change is afoot. The Education Development Plan is strong, addressing local needs and national policy with clear focus. The Plan is enthusiastically supported by the schools, and has sharper arrangements for its evaluation than are evident elsewhere in the work of the LEA. Moreover, the LEA is aware of its weaknesses, and a clear intention to improve was evident from discussion.

9. The weaknesses are in the following functions and services. These are either not adequately performed now, or were undertaken inadequately until so recently that the effects of change are not evident in the schools:-

- the supply of school places;
- support for schools with deficit budgets;
- financial information for governors;
- support for literacy in secondary schools;
- the consistent provision of challenge in relation to target-setting;
- support for secondary school self-review;
- implementation of the SEN strategy;
- the provision of education 16-19;
- the provision of education otherwise than at school;
- the strategy for information and communications technology (ICT);
- the formulation of a behaviour support plan;
- the formulation of the asset management plan for primary schools;
- securing the attendance at school of secondary age Traveller children;
- the provision of advice to schools on the purchase of support;
- the deployment of the Education Psychology Service (EPS);
- support for attendance; and
- monitoring the educational progress of children looked after by the local authority.

10. Some progress has been made in relation to some of these issues. For example, behaviour support and support for attendance have recently been reorganised, in ways that offer potential for improvement; a new database should enable the attainment of looked after children to be more effectively tracked; and progress has also been made in reducing expenditure on statements of special educational need. Moreover, all but one of the schools visited had received support that was - on balance and the weaknesses of individual services notwithstanding - effective. Some services are strong:-

- property services;
- the provision of personnel advice;
- payroll, audit and exchequer services;
- curriculum advice for ICT;

- statementing procedures for SEN;
- the provision of performance data;
- other aspects of support for governors;
- support for literacy in primary schools;
- support for numeracy; and
- collaboration at a senior level with outside partners and other departments of the council.

11. The LEA has begun to improve. But progress has been late in the day. An LEA has to ensure that it fulfils its functions with a view to promoting high standards in its schools. It is accepted that Doncaster LEA intends to discharge that obligation. However, as a consequence of the cumulative weight of weaknesses illustrated at paragraph 9 above, the LEA is not, at present, doing so successfully. To provide good value for money, it will be necessary for the LEA to implement its good intentions fully, and rapidly. It may be also be necessary for OFSTED to appraise the LEA's progress in the near future.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Doncaster LEA 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 groups where English is an additional language. Unemployment has fallen in recent years, but remains approximately three per cent above the national figure. In 1998, 24.1 per cent of pupils in primary schools and 21 per cent in secondary schools were entitled to free school meals. Both figures are higher than the national average, though slightly lower than in former years. Until recently the LEA maintained a high proportion of statements of special need in both primary (5.4 per cent) and secondary (6.8 per cent) schools; these have been reduced considerably as a result of a policy change. In addition, 1.6 per cent of primary age pupils and 2.4 per cent of secondary are educated in special schools. There are sufficient full and part-time places in nursery classes for all pupils of eligible age in the borough.

13. Until 1997, when school reorganisation was completed, there were different forms of school organisation in different parts of the area. There are now 20 infant schools, 19 junior schools, 74 infants and junior schools, 17 secondary schools of which 14 have sixth forms, seven special schools and five PRUs.

Performance

14. A detailed analysis of the schools' performance was supplied to the LEA in the LEA Statistical Profile. The following summary statements indicate the task faced by the LEA:

- The LEA's baseline assessment data shows that levels of attainment in reception classes correspond closely to the average of LEAs and consortia which use the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools baseline;
- At the end of Key Stage 1 in 1998, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 and above in each of the English tests (79 and 80 in reading and writing) was very close to the national average (80 and 81). In 1999, the Key Stage 1 results in reading and writing improved to 82 per cent. Thereafter, pupils' attainment falls increasingly below the national average. There has been improvement in all key stages over recent years, at rates similar to national ones, but the wide gaps remain, particularly in higher grade GCSE results;
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are below the national average in both English and mathematics, although in science they are the same. There has been improvement in all key stages over recent years, at rates similar to national ones but the wide gaps remain, particularly in higher grade GCSE results. In 1998 the percentage of pupils in Doncaster achieving Level 4 or above was 59 per cent in English, 54 per cent in mathematics and 69 per cent in science, compared with 65 per cent, 59 per cent and 69 per cent nationally. There was no significant difference in performance between Doncaster and other LEAs with similar characteristics. Results in English and mathematics have improved in recent years at a slightly higher rate than nationally, and there has been a significant improvement in the 1999 results in both subjects, English reaching 65 per cent and mathematics 64 per cent;
- The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* - C grades did not change significantly in the five years to 1998. At 34.7 per cent in 1998 it was below the national average of 44.7 per cent. In 1999, the gap narrowed slightly. Doncaster improved to 36.8 per cent, compared with the national figure of 46.3 per cent. There has been some improvement in the proportion gaining at least one grade G or better (91.5 per cent) but it remained below the national average in 1998 (95.2 per cent). The proportion of pupils in Doncaster schools who completed their secondary education without securing any GCSE pass (8.5 per cent) was almost double that in the country as a whole (4.8 per cent). In 1999 the gap narrowed to 6.8 per cent compared with 4.3 per cent nationally;
- The post-16 participation rate in Doncaster has been falling in recent years, although there was a slight upturn in 1997. In 1998, only 58.5 per cent stayed on in some form of full-time education, compared with 67.9 per cent nationally;
- A slight improvement in A-level standards has occurred in recent years, although this has been considerably less than the national improvement. In 1998, 15.9 per cent of Doncaster students gained two or more A-level passes, compared with 17.6 per cent nationally;

- As in the country as a whole, boys' overall achievement in all key stages is below that of girls. This is particularly so in English and literacy, both of which impede their progress in many other aspects of their work;
- School inspections show that the proportion of good or very good primary schools in Doncaster is slightly higher than in the country as a whole, and that the proportion requiring significant improvement is about the same. However, the proportion of secondary schools needing some improvement is considerably higher than nationally, although of these only one school was shown to need substantial improvement. There are two schools requiring special measures, one primary and one secondary; this is lower than the proportion nationally. There is one school classified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses, and three identified as a cause of concern by the LEA;
- The rate of permanent exclusions in primary schools is close to the national average. In secondary schools it was well above average in 1998, but has reduced significantly in the last year;
- Attendance in primary schools is a little below the national average. In secondary schools, attendance fell in two of the last four years, and in 1998 it was well below the national average, the rate of unauthorised attendance being almost double that nationally. There was a slight up turn in secondary attendance in 1999;

15. The 1999 results notwithstanding, there is a pressing need to improve standards, particularly in secondary schools. The completion of the structural reorganisation of schools is an important step. This, together with the recent restructuring of the education department, is likely to enable more time and resources to be focused on the work of the schools.

Funding

16. Doncaster has traditionally spent at or above Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). This pattern changed in 1998/99, but the LEA quickly resolved to restore the previous situation as soon as possible. The result is that between 98/99 and 99/00 there was a 4.3 per cent increase in the Education SSA, but a 5 per cent increase in the Education budget. The current budget is slightly below the Education SSA (by 0.56 per cent), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: SSA compared to Budget

	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
Budget £000	122,636	128,753	135,313
SSA £000	118,608	130,350	136,085
Budget as % of SSA	103%	98.7%	99.4%

17. The LEA has consistently protected school budgets at the cost of cuts to central services. It delegates more money per pupil to primary and secondary schools than the average Metropolitan Borough.

Table 2: Per Pupil Allocations

	PRIMARY	SECONDARY
Delegated budget (£ per pupil) DONCASTER	£1686	£2438
Delegated budget (£ per pupil) MET. AVE.	£1625	£2272

18. However, the LEA currently delegates a slightly lower than average percentage of the Local Schools Budget to schools. This is largely because of the amount of money retained centrally for Special Education Needs (SEN) provision (paragraph 32).

Table 3: Level of Delegation

	LEA	Metropolitan authorities	England
% of the Local School Budget Delegated to schools in 1999/2000	81.4%	82.0%	82.4%
% of the General School Budget, Delegated to schools in 1998/99	78.3%	79.4%	79.2%

19. The LEA's consultation process for **Fair Funding** has been extensive and appreciated by schools. The LEA has responded to comments from schools as the process has evolved. There is clear documentary evidence that the Council's central recharges are known and can thus be represented in both the further delegation and charging packages. The school visits showed that schools will wish to purchase LEA services initially, using the first year of the new system to work with the LEA to ensure that services deliver what schools want.

20. The school survey and the LEA's own surveys show high levels of satisfaction with the quality of service level agreements. Middle managers of LEA services have recently been given more responsibility and are now more accountable for a range of areas, including budget planning and monitoring. As yet, however, the LEA does not make enough use of benchmarking and other performance indicators in order to have a robust mechanism of performance management likely to meet Best Value criteria.

Council Structure

21. Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) has 63 members, of whom 43 are Labour (the whip has been withdrawn from seven of these), nine are Liberal Democrat, five are Conservative and six are Independent. This year DMBC reorganised its committees to form six Boards responsible, respectively, for social services, housing and environment, development and transport, trading services, and education and culture. The Council's officers are organised into six Directorates, reflecting the Board structure. This simplified organisation has the advantage of providing clear structures for the formulation of policy, for decision making and for delegation.

The Education Development Plan

22. Doncaster's Education Development Plan (EDP) has considerable strengths. As a result of the extensive consultations with the schools, with other Directorates of DMBC and with the LEA's external partners, it carries the widespread and enthusiastic commitment of the educational and broader community of the area, in particular to raising standards. This commitment bodes well for the plan's implementation.

23. The EDP's school improvement programme has seven priorities:

- 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 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;
- 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; and
- to improve the quality of school leadership, management and governance.

24. The EDP is effective in demonstrating how the priorities have been derived from a clear audit of schools' strengths and weaknesses using test and examination results, other performance data, the conclusions of OFSTED school inspections and the local inspectors' own evaluations of the schools. This audit is particularly strong in producing priorities which reflect local needs as well as attending to government policy initiatives. The most distinctive is that to improve standards of oracy. The need for the priority is established mainly on the basis of local knowledge, and is supported by some recent OFSTED reports.

25. A similar strategy and audit underpins the priority to improve pupils' participation in learning, although in this case the audit is able to make more use of evidence from performance data and inspection reports to support the priority. The priority also supports the LEA's drive to reach its attendance and exclusion targets.

There is a weakness in this priority. Although one objective is to increase "the percentage of pupils making positive progression at age 16", the need to increase the staying on rate into school sixth forms and further education colleges does not receive the emphasis it should, given the present low post-16 participation rate.

26. The individual school attainment targets for English at the end of Key Stage 2 fall short of the LEA's overall target for the year 2000. There is a five per cent gap between the two figures. The LEA has, however, set out its plans to intensify its support for literacy and the figure for the 1999 Key Stage 2 tests (59 per cent) show that, in practice, the gap has already begun to narrow. Nevertheless, the evidence of the school visits suggests that some individual schools' targets were set too low. The process and practice of target setting is reported in Section 2 (paragraphs 38-45).

27. The EDP sets out clear arrangements for evaluating the LEA's progress towards the plan's implementation. These have a particular strength in the use they make of quantifiable criteria to measure the outcomes of the various activities which the plan proposes. The use of these indicators represents an important step forward in the LEA's evaluation of its services and a step towards the changes it will have to introduce as part of the Best Value process.

28. The cost of the EDP is reasonable and the plan itself relates clearly to the LEA's other plans. The activities themselves are set out in a practical way and clearly costed. They do not overlap but have been carefully constructed to reinforce one another. The intention to improve the progress of pupils with SEN is disseminated throughout the plan, as well as receiving specific attention in priority 6.

29. It is too early for there to be much hard evidence as yet of the LEA's success in implementing the plan.

30. The plan sets out the intended strategy for monitoring and evaluating its implementation. Much of the responsibility for this rests with the Quality Assurance Group (QAG) of the Education Standards Group (ESG). It will be supplemented by an evaluative report from schools, and from teachers and governors on the various aspects of the plan's implementation with which they have contact. The strategy also provides for a series of discussion groups to contribute to the evaluation of specific aspects of the plan.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

31. This year the LEA has sought to change its budget strategy and target resources at providing leadership and challenge, raising standards and lifelong learning. The LEA has made a successful start on allocating its resources to its educational priorities. There is evidence of moves in this direction: some are modest, others are highly significant, such as the £850,000 shift of resources to schools' budgets for SEN to enable schools to intervene earlier in support of pupils with learning difficulties (see Section 4). One consequence of this new approach has been a modest expansion in central staffing. After consulting schools, some of the money available for growth was used for this purpose. Because of previous cuts at the centre, Doncaster is not a high spending LEA on central functions.

Table 4: Comparative data on Central Budgets (figures are rounded)

	LEA (£ per pupil)	Metropolitan authorities (£ per pupil)	England (£ per pupil)
Statutory and regulatory duties	37	51	49
Specific grant	48	47	41
Special education	160	136	152
School improvement(EDP)	11	19	22
Access (excluding Transport)	97	112	82
Home to school transport	38	41	69

32. Table 4 shows SEN expenditure is high, particularly compared to similar authorities. Within the total figure for SEN, Doncaster spends about average on most categories, but spends about 60 per cent above the metropolitan average on support for statemented pupils. Although this is acknowledged by the LEA to be still too high, it is considerably less than in previous years. The intention is that this budget will decrease for some time as the number of statements declines. The funds released will be used to enable schools to provide earlier support.

33. The comparative figure for school improvement does not imply that Doncaster gives this area low priority. To illustrate this, an additional 6.2 inspection and advisory staff have been centrally funded since last year. In line with the spirit of the Fair Funding regime, approximately 30 per cent of the costs of the Quality Assurance Service has been delegated to schools. Doncaster has indicated in its EDP how it expects to recover these costs by providing training and consultancy to schools linked directly to EDP priorities. If this target is not met, given the standards challenge of the Borough, a reassessment of the proportion delegated will be needed for next year. The EDP costings are set out very clearly in terms of advisor days, and simple cost benchmarking may be dangerous in this first year of EDP accounting methodology.

34. Doncaster has been successful in gaining access to those parts of the Standards Fund which require bids. The LEA has also been successful in maintaining levels of delegation in the face of the additional demands to meet matched funding requirements as a result of successful bids. Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funds have been secured and these are being used effectively to promote increased pupil performance in literacy and oracy. No Education Action Zone bid has been successful. A new bid is planned for the next round.

Recommendations

35. The Education and Culture Board should continue to review and revise expenditure patterns to ensure that they are consistent with education priorities (paragraphs 31-34)

36. The EDP should be improved by developing a more specific programme to increase post-16 participation in education (paragraph 25).

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of Other Functions

37. The EDP is the main vehicle for school improvement, but standards may be affected by actions not in the EDP. In Doncaster, waste of resources on surplus places (paragraphs 121-124), small sixth forms (paragraphs 73, 74 and 125), and problems with the implementation of some elements of the strategy for SEN (Section 4), have done little to assist schools. By contrast, some management support services (paragraphs 90-100) have assisted school improvement.

Monitoring, Challenge, Support, Intervention

38. The Quality Assurance Group includes the inspectors. The Group has developed a strategy for monitoring the performance of schools which has been discussed with headteachers on several occasions recently. Monitoring the extent to which individual schools meet their targets is the responsibility of the pyramid inspector, using evidence derived from school visits to monitor the introduction of the national strategy for literacy and numeracy, a study of reports arising from Section 10 inspections, and from data provided by the schools and analysed by the Standards and Effectiveness Unit (SEU) of the Group.

39. This strategy for monitoring the performance of schools is well conceived in the context of the resources available and the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations. The strategy supplements data analysis and enables inspectors to form a reliable view about the prospect of schools achieving their targets, and provide an early warning of prospective under-performance. However, support for the PRUs through monitoring their staff development needs is not systematic enough.

40. The LEA has issued a detailed booklet setting out guidance to schools on approaches to **target setting** supplemented by training programmes. Most schools visited reported that they had found the training valuable but some found the process insensitive to the effects of changes in the performance of small numbers of pupils. Others believe the process is too simply statistical, and some headteachers have chosen to use their own way of setting targets.

41. Although the approach recommended distinguishes carefully between a forecast and a target - a message which is now clearly understood in the schools visited - in practice the work of the inspectors on target setting visits did not offer

consistent challenge to the schools. Nor did that work prompt schools to define the changes they will make in order to achieve their targets.

42. Following the receipt of its data analysis, each school is expected to formulate its provisional targets. It receives a visit from the pyramid inspector to support whole-school target setting, and to formally agree targets with headteachers and governors. For secondary schools there are also visits by subject inspectors to discuss targets at departmental level. This is seen by the LEA as meeting a short-term need until more experience of target setting is established in secondary school subject departments.

43. From the school visits it became clear that although inspectors are expected to use a common process for the target setting discussions, there was, during the first round of target setting, considerable variation in the extent to which schools were challenged. In some, it was clear that the discussion had been in considerable detail, and included an exploration of the implications of the targets for teaching. In others, very modest targets were set, representing a low level of challenge to the schools. This was the case in two of the secondary schools and four of the primary schools visited. During the first round of target setting not enough was done to ensure a common approach, and challenging targets for all schools.

44. The practice of each inspector being attached to a "pyramid" of schools - a secondary school and its contributory primary schools - is a major feature of the deployment of the Group. Schools value this arrangement for the continuity it affords. There are some strengths in this arrangement but it also has disadvantages. For example, experience and expertise in the senior management of secondary schools is in short supply in the Group, and is sometimes not available to the secondary schools because it is taken up in working with primary schools in the pyramid.

45. The strategy for intervention, successful for the most part, but requiring some extension, is reported below in work with schools causing concern (paragraphs 56-59). That for support - again generally effective - is reported below in paragraphs 64-65.

Collection and Analysis of Data

46. Data provided by the SEU is of good quality and comprehensive in scope, enabling schools to compare many facets of their performance with that of other schools in the LEA working in similar socio-economic contexts. Suitable training and advice has been provided to schools on how they can make use of the data. However, several of the primary schools visited needed still more help, encouragement and support in knowing how to make the most effective use of the data. Secondary schools have more experience in the interpretation and use of performance data. They have welcomed the data provided by the LEA but have not sought or received enough guidance on how it can be used to improve teaching and learning.

47. Benefits have come particularly from the presentation of comparative data for schools within the LEA, and some use has already been made of this to further the sharing of good practice between schools. This prevents the identification of good practice. Overall, however, the provision of performance data is managed effectively and represents a valuable service to the schools.

Support for Literacy

48. Doncaster faces a major challenge if it is to raise standards of literacy in primary schools. The authority is appropriately ambitious, and has set an overall target figure of 79 per cent for 2002, but (paragraph 26) some schools have been less optimistic when setting their own targets.

49. The LEA's overall strategy for improvement in literacy in primary schools is sound, and is giving good value. The centrepiece is the implementation of the NLS, but this is sensibly complemented by other work such as improving family literacy, raising standards amongst minority ethnic pupils, and supporting schools in disadvantaged areas. There is also a project to improve literacy at secondary schools but this is too small scale, given the significant needs in that phase.

50. In the school survey primary schools rate the authority's support for literacy as better than satisfactory, but all surveyed secondary schools rate it as less than satisfactory. Both of these judgements were confirmed by the school visits. The introductory training for all primary schools achieved its purpose, although it failed to enthuse some schools. Once the literacy team got into its stride, however, schools given intensive support benefited from the thorough work undertaken on their five-day course and from careful and sensitive advice and demonstration by the literacy consultants. In some cases this has gone some way to easing schools' worries about the implications of the changes. Other schools have, appropriately, received much less support but still appreciate the good access they have to advice and to resources. All schools' progress is monitored systematically by pyramid inspectors.

51. Some primaries receive additional support funded by the SRB. This has provided them with a good basis on which to introduce the NLS. The authority will need to continue to monitor progress carefully in all lower performing schools to ascertain whether other schools also need further support next year.

52. The LEA's initiative to improve secondary literacy has only recently been established. However, the SRB project, well supported by the LEA, has already achieved good outcomes in one secondary school. Early tasks facing the project include ensuring that pupils' work in the summer schools is consolidated in Year 7, and that secondary teachers have a good firsthand knowledge of initiatives in the primary phase.

Support for Numeracy

53. The authority faces a similarly challenging task in supporting schools in raising numeracy standards. However, primary schools are more confident in this work than they are in literacy, and their collated targets match the LEA's target of raising the

proportion of Year 6 pupils achieving at least Level 4 in mathematics from 54 per cent (1998) to 74 per cent in 2002.

54. The authority's strategy is well-planned and usefully includes a more significant element of support for secondary schools. The central activity, implementation of the NNS in primary schools, is too recently initiated to allow confident evaluation but the early signs suggest that it is already achieving success. Schools have responded to the training with enthusiasm and those visited are generally making the changes in practice which are necessary. Some, with appropriate LEA support, had usefully made a start one year early on some aspects. Schools now getting intensive support found their five-day training helpful and have, even at this early stage, received beneficial support from their consultant in planning their initiatives. Other schools are well aware of the advisory support available to them and in some cases the consultants have already proved themselves to be responsive and effective. Overall, then, the LEA appears to have got this strategy off to a promising start.

Support for ICT

55. The LEA support for curriculum ICT and ICT in support for management are reported as a single service in Section 3 (paragraphs 97-100).

Support for Schools Causing Concern

56. The planning for dealing with schools causing concern is strong. Apart from the schools identified by OFSTED inspection, there are procedures, using data analysis as well as LEA inspectors' visits to schools, to identify other schools causing concern. These are designated schools with priorities for improvement (SPI). This early identification is followed up by LEA inspection visits to identify the areas of weakness for which the school must produce an agreed action plan. Officers' responsibilities for providing support are clearly defined, the work is specifically costed and there is a strong programme for assessing the progress made by the school and evaluating the effectiveness of the support provided.

57. Following OFSTED school inspections, Doncaster has two schools in special measures and one with serious weaknesses. At the time of the OFSTED inspection of the LEA, the latter, since beginning to implement the EDP, had identified three further schools as SPI. However, in view of the overall standards achieved, it seems inevitable that these are not the only under-performing schools.

58. The SPI schools visited in the course of this inspection have begun to improve as a result of the LEA's intervention, which involves a mixture of consultancy and Inset. The schools' action plans are clear and specific because they are constructed to deal with problems effectively identified by the LEA's inspection visits. The reports these visits produce are strongly evaluative and provide useful recommendations. The schools also make good use of the extra funding which SPI status attracts. The schools visited have developed classroom monitoring with the aid of this funding to release staff time for the work. The SPI work has strengthened the schools' management in this way and through the use of other support, such as headteachers who act as mentors. The schools have been able to build further on

other aspects of the LEA's support, for example, intensive support for numeracy and literacy. A programme of monitoring visits by the LEA's inspectors produces further sharp and useful reports to guide the schools' progress.

59. Doncaster's support for schools causing concern has been more formally and systematically organised as part of the development of the EDP. In this, the LEA has been able to work on the basis of existing practice which was already broadly effective. The number of schools identified by OFSTED in need of special measures and with serious weaknesses is a lower proportion than the national figures. The weakness in support for schools causing concern has been in the lack of attention so far given to schools which, though not showing acute problems, have failed to make enough improvement in their pupils' attendance and their success in tests and examinations.

Support for Governors

60. Support for school governance is effective and provides good value. The LEA's training for them is well attended, especially by newly appointed governors. Sixty-eight per cent of governors had some training last year. Some governing bodies have arranged training for their individual needs: this is a strength of the provision. Governors also value the openness of officers, particularly the Director, and the readiness of officers to provide specialist advice for them on request. In addition to training and specific support, governors in the schools visited reported very favourably on the LEA's means of communicating and consulting with them. The governors' forums, the clerking service and the regular newsletter are all valued. The EDP attaches particular priority to developing the role of governors as strategic managers of their schools. It is too soon to assess the success of this work fully but the early indications from the school visits are that clear progress is being made in some individual schools, particularly through the governors' training programme and the forums. There is a weakness in provision of financial information for governors (paragraph 96). The LEA has had success in its level of recruitment of governors, in part through an innovative advertising campaign.

Support for School Management

61. Improving school leadership, management and governance is the seventh priority of the EDP. Support for school management has been mixed in quality. The LEA has made progress with most of the activities set out in the plan to improve the management of schools by headteachers and other teachers with management responsibilities, but progress has been uneven amongst the activities and between schools. Useful new guidance has been produced for the appointment of headteachers and deputies and a revised appraisal scheme for headteachers and teachers is in operation. The national training and development schemes for aspiring and serving headteachers are being increasingly used and a trial scheme to enable primary schools to gain accreditation under the Investors in People (IiP) scheme is operating. Revised guidance for school development plans (SDPs) has also been produced. The guidance requires schools to show how their plans relate to the EDP. For all the schools' support for the EDP, not all of those visited showed the required connections in their SDPs.

62. The school visits showed that the LEA has been most effective where need for improvement was greatest: in the SPI schools. Increased delegation, particularly of SEN funds, has also enabled the strongest headteachers to manage more effectively. The management elements of the LEA's Inset programme have led to improvements in some schools, as have networking arrangements between secondary heads and within some pyramids. Management development has been neglected in PRUs but, at the request of the institutions, the education department now plans to run some specific Inset for them.

63. Improving schools' processes of self-review is a specific activity in the EDP. It is, so far, an aim which has met with mixed success. In primary schools, particularly in headteachers' evaluation of teaching, there has been some progress due to the operation of the revised appraisal system. The LEA's analysis of OFSTED inspection reports shows this progress in primary schools. The need for self-review is now much less common than it was as a key issue for action after inspection. The school visits also showed how the LEA's work in support of the NLS has initiated a further increase in classroom monitoring. Progress in secondary schools has been slow. The schools have not had enough support to become self-evaluating, an important matter if teaching is to be improved and examination results are to rise. The value provided by support for headteachers is mixed. For it to improve, it will be necessary to extend and improve the work to make schools, especially secondary schools, more self-evaluative.

Other Areas

64. In this first year of Fair Funding, 93 per cent of primary schools and all special schools have chosen to purchase the **consultancy** package. Ten of the 17 secondary schools have bought the full package. Some of the remaining seven have bought in partially.

65. Visits to schools showed that primary schools in particular value this aspect of the Quality Assurance Group work, and secondary schools value some features of it. The main reservations expressed by the secondary schools were that the Group's expertise and experience in some areas of work is limited and that there is unevenness in the quality of the provision. Schools are anxious that by purchasing the consultancy package they do not limit their access to a wider range of sources of advice and consultancy. They not unreasonably expect that the QAG will not restrict the source of consultancy and advice to its own members. The LEA has not developed a brokering service to help schools identify reliable external sources of expertise. Such a function would add considerably to the value provided by this aspect of the work.

66. **Raising the standard of pupils' speaking and listening** is the second priority of Doncaster's EDP. The work has only just begun and it is too soon to evaluate its effectiveness. However, the school visits, particularly to primary schools, show that of all the EDP priorities, this one carried the most enthusiastic support of governors, headteachers and their staff. The evidence of documentation and discussion with officers showed that planning for the proposed work is good.

67. A strength of the planning for oracy in the EDP is that it covers pre-school and early years work as well as the National Curriculum and that it involves parents, especially of young children, as well as the schools themselves. The plan has also been constructed in such a way as to build on other LEA work, for example, the teaching of pupils for whom English is an additional language and the introduction of the High Scope early years project. A systematic programme of development in schools and LEA support has been set out in the EDP.

68. The LEA support has been of sound quality, mainly in the form of general advisory help with English and drama. This, combined with the raised profile for oracy in the schools, created in part through the consultation and debate which has accompanied the formulation of the EDP, has placed the schools visited in a sound position to move forward. In practice, many of the schools still have a lot to do. The schools in a stronger position to develop their work further, about half of those where the issue was inspected, are those able to build on existing initiatives. In two of them the initiatives were the schools' own but in three the schools were building on other work supported by the LEA, SRB funded work in two and SPI (paragraph 58) work in a third.

69. Doncaster has made a good start to the implementation of its work in oracy and the early indications, particularly where the work is building on existing initiatives, are that it is offering sound value.

70. Attainment at age 16 and the low rate of post-16 participation show that the LEA faces considerable problems in the area of **14-19 curriculum and provision**.

71. Until recently, the LEA's role in relation to the 14-19 curriculum has been that of supporting and enabling initiatives developed by schools and groups of schools, chiefly through the agency of the 14-19 group of the Doncaster Curriculum Partnership (DCP), itself a part of the LEA. More recently, however, the LEA has seen the need to develop a more proactive and co-ordinating role, and a year ago appointed an education inspector with a specific 14-19 responsibility.

72. Few developments have yet taken place in the Key Stage 4 curriculum in secondary schools in areas other than in GCSE courses. There has been little development of courses leading to other forms of accreditation. Four schools have pupils involved in a work-related pilot, and six schools have recently launched GNVQ courses. The Key Stage 4 PRUs, however, are more used to utilising non-GCSE accreditation.

73. In the 16-19 area, two national pilot projects have just started to operate. There is the Progress File, a project which begins in Year 9; Doncaster is one of 10 LEAs to take part. Very significantly, in view of the low continuation rate, the LEA is also taking part in the Education Maintenance Allowance pilot. The LEA has been successful in bidding for funding to develop key skills in the 16-19 curriculum of nine schools. GNVQ courses at advanced and/or intermediate levels form part of the curriculum in all schools which have sixth forms; four provide foundation courses in addition. The LEA has facilitated the schools' membership of a GNVQ network

package with neighbouring LEAs. The support provided to schools in developing this dimension of their post-16 curriculum is good and the schools value it highly.

74. The main problems the LEA faces in relation to the 16-19 age range are the rationalisation of its sixth form provision, and the need to develop a policy for this. All but three of its 17 secondary schools have sixth forms. Of these, one has fewer than 50 students; four others have fewer than 100 and four more fewer than 150. All but one of these have sixth form curricula which include GNVQ courses, adding to the already considerable difficulties of providing suitably sized teaching groups in several subjects. Even when the usual strategies such as mixed age teaching groups are employed, the authority is faced with the considerable problem of large numbers of A-level students working in groups which are too small for the best quality of learning and which are very costly to operate. The LEA has not developed a 16-19 provision policy to remove these problems (Section 5, paragraph 125 and the associated recommendation).

75. The LEA has responded to **low achievement by boys** with another project managed by the DCP. This was first introduced in one pyramid in 1996, and has been extended to five others subsequently, together with one of the PRUs. Mainly, but not exclusively, the work has been focused on literacy and oracy with three key age groups: Years 1, 6 and 7. Training, some of it provided by outside authority consultants, has sought to heighten the awareness of the problem, to examine the main underlying reasons and factors, and to consider implications for aspects of teaching such as the use of language in the classroom, the selection of materials and, in particular, the identification of topics for guided reading and writing for boys. Many headteachers, and teachers in schools which have taken part in the project, speak convincingly of the benefits which have been derived from the project. By raising the awareness of teachers and encouraging them to develop teaching strategies more likely to engage boys, the project has made a start but it has yet to show that it is having a tangible effect on boys' attainment.

Recommendations

76. There should be better, expert support for secondary schools' headteachers (paragraph 44).

77. There should be a common approach among inspectors in their work with schools on target setting, to ensure that the targets of all schools are appropriately challenging (paragraphs 38-43).

78. Schools should be provided with a quality-controlled register of alternative sources of consultancy, advice and evaluation (paragraph 65).

79. SPI 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 (paragraph 59).

80. More support should be given to improve schools' capacity to evaluate themselves (paragraph 63).

81. In the interests of improving attainment and increasing post-16 participation, the work on developing the 14-19 curriculum should be accelerated (paragraphs 71-73).

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

82. The corporate planning of DMBC and its role as a LEA have undergone major review and reorganisation in the last two years. The process is not yet complete and some documentation and systems, although planned for, have yet to be finalised and put fully into operation. Nevertheless, much has been achieved and, in several respects, the LEA's strategic management is more effective in practice than it is on paper.

83. The highest level of strategy is set out in Doncaster's "Agenda for Change". This document is supplemented by objectives which include raising standards of attainment. It is developed into the current annual plan: "Opportunities - Doncaster's Development Plan". The document presents Doncaster's main development priorities this year as social regeneration, health and care, customer care, human resource development incorporating lifelong learning, maximising physical resources and Best Value. Of these, social regeneration is seen by officers and Members as that which touches most closely on schools, although it does not refer to them explicitly. The priority for human resource development relates to the development of DMBC's staff and is not connected to schools. The development plan lists DMBC's existing plans, including those such as the LEA's Strategic Plan and the EDP which are directly the product of the LEA, but does not show how those plans relate to the overall DMBC strategy. Similarly, those latter plans do not show explicitly how they are related to the overall development plan. The LEA's Strategic Plan does, however, gather together all of the strategic objectives of the constituent parts of the Education and Culture Directorate and relates these to the values and more general objectives of the Directorate as a whole. However, the relationship is in checklist form and not fully articulated, nor is it fully developed into operational plans throughout the Directorate.

84. This planning process is weak but some elements in the documentation do relate clearly to, and serve to put into practice, both the values of the Education and Culture Directorate and the DMBC Development Plan. Two priorities from the EDP illustrate this. The first is the priority to increase participation in education and the second is the priority for oracy. These relate directly, if not explicitly, to the culture element of the Directorate and to the aim, within DMBC's social regeneration priority, "to develop cultural strategies as a basis for economic regeneration". Moreover, the visits showed they are both, particularly the work on oracy, seen by the schools and the LEA's officers as part of that strategy.

85. Some schools, the visits showed, also see the LEA's strategy more generally as being a part of regeneration but most of them, having only recently received the LEA's Strategic Plan, see it as distant from them and not such a clear articulation of

strategy as the EDP itself. They are highly aware of the latter document and highly supportive of its priorities as a result of the thorough and effective consultation procedures. The schools also gain an understanding of LEA strategy implicitly through their day-to-day contacts with officers. They see the LEA as supportive of them and as operating the Code of Practice for relationships between schools and LEAs. They understand and support the principle of intervention where there are identified weaknesses and support by request in areas where improvement, if less urgent, is still needed.

86. The key to the schools' understanding of the LEA's development strategy lies in its effective structures for communication and joint working. Similarly, within the Directorate itself, although the paper planning does not fully articulate the connection between operational and strategic management, discussion shows officers know how their work contributes to the whole. The regular meetings of the three heads of sections with both service managers and the Director are intended to, and do, ensure that this happens. Similarly, at DMBC level the regular meeting of all the Executive Directors with the Chief Executive and with Members have created a clear strategic style and corporate culture. The arrangements for corporate working, for delegation, and for advice to Members are effective. In particular, the simplification of decision making in the Education and Culture Board has enabled Members to concentrate more on strategic than operational decisions.

87. The EDP has not only represented a step forward in strategic planning; it has also represented a step forward in the evaluation of managerial success because each of its priorities are to be clearly measured against quantified success criteria. Evaluative procedures are less well developed for other aspects of the LEA's work and that of DMBC more generally, because they do not make such systematic use of measurable outcomes. The Education and Culture Directorate uses a well-planned system of appraisal for its officers, but the system attends to development needs and to success in developing processes rather than outcomes. There is no consistent or comprehensive system of performance management in the local authority as a whole. The need for one is acknowledged by officers and more consistent use of quantifiable success criteria will be necessitated by the Best Value initiative, itself one of DMBC's development priorities.

88. The corporate culture of DMBC facilitates effective working between the Directorates, which is of direct benefit to education where services used by schools are provided by other Directorates. Collaboration is generally effective, especially at top level through the Council-wide Executive Board. Collaboration with the Social Services Directorate, for example over the production of the Early Years Development Plan and the Child Care Plan, has been very effective at a senior level. The school visits showed that collaboration is less effective on the ground between social workers and schools (paragraph 134).

89. Beyond DMBC, the LEA liaises effectively with its other partners, to the benefit of the schools. The Health Authority, the Diocese of Sheffield, South Yorkshire Police, the TEC and the FE Doncaster College all report excellent relations with the LEA and effective collaboration, as relevant, in curriculum and staff development work and in joint planning. Representative groups of parents,

governors, headteachers and other teachers also reported excellent relationships with the LEA, and general approval of its services.

Management Services

90. **Personnel Services** were consistently rated by schools as good whether it was for administrative functions or professional support for school managers and governors on potentially difficult issues. All headteachers interviewed felt that this service was one they would wish to buy back after delegation.

91. Apart from some local difficulties with direct services operations, schools rate the **Property Services** as good. The property stock is generally in good condition; DMBC rightly prides itself on the long-term investment made in its school buildings. Recently, security fencing has been provided for many schools. This is already having a measurable effect on the level of repairs needed because of vandalism, and headteachers commented on the marked, positive effects on staff morale.

92. The Asset Management Plan (AMP) is progressing well, but the approach adopted in the primary sector has weaknesses. The perception of those primary headteachers interviewed was that they were being asked, after a site visit from an architect, to draw up a 'wish list' of developments for their school. The methodology is not likely to provide the LEA with a sound evidence base upon which to develop the AMP further in to an agreed set of development priorities. The model used in secondary schools is more costly but the quality of data produced is more consistent with the requirements of the AMP.

93. There is a range of **Financial Services** available to schools, many of which are well regarded by school managers. The LEA does not, however, have a structured approach to school budget monitoring.

94. School managers are presented with a clear budget statement which enables them to check their allocation whilst giving guidance about priority resource levels, for example, SEN. Help is available for budget setting and forward planning. The LMS unit has provided much appreciated support and training for the implementation of the SIMS platform, and their helpline is well regarded, especially by school secretaries. This development is at an early stage and the evidence is that it is not yet proving cost effective. Even in a secondary school visited, parallel paper accounts were being kept because of current lack of confidence in the system. There is obviously much work to be done in this area to make full use of the other potentially valuable facilities. Its success will only be fully realised when there is a coherent approach to ICT initiatives within the LEA.

95. Exchequer, payroll and audit services are good, the latter in particular receiving many plaudits from school managers.

96. The total number of schools with deficit budgets has been reduced since last year. There is, however, a hard core of schools with deficits in excess of 2.5 per cent where progress is less secure. Although interviews confirmed that targets for reduction had been agreed, there was no evidence of a tightly structured, documented approach, with milestones and agreed strategies being clearly set

down. The most disturbing example was of a school with a deficit which can only be described as critical, for which no documented recovery plan was produced. The District Auditor has regularly commented on aspects of budget monitoring such as the lack of provision of financial data for governors; the fact that such reports have recurred over recent years suggests that the LEA has failed to ensure that school managers pass on financial information to governors.

97. The strategic planning of the LEA's **support for curriculum and management ICT** is weak. The ICT development plan provided for the inspection was a draft for discussion and had many shortcomings. Amongst other things it lacked data on equipment in schools, on the links between schools and the LEA, and on schools' use of ICT to improve learning, although this is a priority in the EDP. There is too much attention to process targets rather than measurable outcomes in, for example, increased administrative efficiency.

98. Advisory teachers give good support to schools in response to requests for help with the use of ICT in the curriculum, but advice on hardware has been inconsistent. The school survey indicated a low regard for the level of support for schools in developing their National Grid for Learning (NGfL) bids although at least one of the schools visited praised the help provided by the LEA.

99. The major weakness in the area of ICT is that the leadership and management of the service have lacked direction. Strategic planning and development groups have recently been established but these need co-ordination to be effective. This situation was not being helped at the time of the inspection by the difficulty in recruiting to such a key post.

100. Previous shortcomings in policy formulation in this area have led to schools becoming disenchanted with the ability of the LEA to provide leadership. Schools have, as a result, reached a wide variety of individual solutions to their needs. Defining both a development strategy and a relevant support package for schools with such a mixed economy will not be easy. Although a recent list of positive steps taken by the LEA was discussed prior to the school visits, with one exception these had not yet had an impact on schools. To establish its credibility as a leader in, and provider of, ICT services is now one of the major challenges for the LEA.

Recommendations

101. The place of education should be more clearly and prominently identified in the Council's strategic priorities (paragraph 83).

102. The relationship between high level strategy and operational management should be clearer in LEA documentation (paragraphs 83 and 84).

103. Evaluation should be strengthened by making more use of measurable indicators of success (paragraph 87).

104. Day-to-day communication between social workers and schools should be strengthened (paragraphs 88 and 134).

105. Urgent action should assist schools with deficit budgets to recover by producing an agreed, formalised action plan (paragraph 96).

106. Governing bodies should have regular access to budget monitoring data (paragraph 96).

107. A programme should be established and implemented to meet schools' increasing diverse needs for ICT development (paragraphs 97-100).

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

108. The LEA has made radical changes in its SEN strategy, seeking to increase inclusion, to reduce the numbers of statements and to delegate the released resources to schools (paragraph 32). The changes followed extensive and effective consultation. Progress in reducing the number of statements has been rapid and should continue with the application of revised criteria for statutory assessment.

109. The changes in funding have gone smoothly and will continue through a transitional period of two years to enable schools to adjust to their new budgets. The chief issue now facing the LEA in the implementation of the strategy is now the future role of the Teaching Support Service (TSS). The service has been, historically, an exceptionally large one. It now employs 460 part-time learning support assistants in schools, most of whom have little or no direct contact with the service's central management. The skills and expertise of the teachers in the TSS are highly valued by schools, but buying in these services with the newly delegated funds in much the same way as they have previously provided inhibits schools from taking on their full responsibilities for special needs by, for example, making more flexible provision for pupils than can be provided by visiting external staff. At the same time, the emphasis on peripatetic teaching prevents the TSS from supporting improvement in schools where there are weaknesses, and monitoring schools' use of the newly delegated funding. A District Audit report (1997) recommended that the service should have a more strategic role. The LEA has recognised this need and has consulted with schools about it. There is now a growing need for urgent action, especially as further funds are delegated to schools.

110. Doncaster places a little more than the national average of its pupils in special schools. A review of special schools began in 1996. No clear future plan has yet emerged. Funding in special schools is low in comparison with national figures, although several special schools are funded for surplus places, in one case 25 per cent of places. The LEA is planning to review the funding formula. There are a number of pressures on some special schools, for example, the growing number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties who are sometimes not suitably placed. Furthermore, there is insufficient collaboration at a day-to-day level between health, social services and education.

111. Special schools, with the support of the LEA, are making increased use of mainstream schools to broaden the curriculum of the special schools' pupils for part of the time; there is a willingness on the part of the mainstream schools to support them. There is, however, a lack of a clear role for the special schools in supporting mainstream schools in partnership with the TSS.

112. The EPS provides a quality of service which is generally appreciated by schools and it has a targeted approach to the deployment of staff at school level. However, the service does not spend enough time in schools. The proportion of service time already extracted from that allocated to schools is too high, being earmarked for assumptions about leave entitlement, anticipated sickness leave, management duties and professional development.

Statutory Obligations

113. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory duties and has some good practice in this respect, for example, the percentage of statements written within the recommended time scale is among the highest in the country, and attendance at annual reviews by LEA officers is good.

Improvement and Value for Money

114. The strategy for SEN is good but there are weaknesses in its implementation. The reduction in the numbers of statements is progressing, together with the changes in funding policy, but weaknesses remain in the strategic function of the TSS and the role of special schools.

115. The value offered by SEN provision is not yet good and will not improve until the new strategy is fully implemented and the poor deployment of educational psychologists is remedied.

Analysis

116. The LEA has an embryo development plan for SEN, linked with the EDP. The areas for development identified in the strategic plan are relevant, if extensive, but there is no detailed planning or time scales. The plan lacks clear priorities, for example, more effective targets for raising the achievement of pupils with SEN, and a means of monitoring both the expenditure and the effectiveness of the strategy of early intervention. Whilst some effective monitoring of management systems is in place, there is an absence of robust mechanisms to provide evidence of improved achievement for pupils. There is also a lack of clear planning for the changes which are becoming necessary in special schools as the policy of inclusion changes the size and nature of their intakes.

Recommendations

117. There should be a clearer role for the TSS to enable it to play its part in developing and monitoring SEN provision in schools, including the use of newly delegated funds (paragraph 110).

118. The role and intake of each special school should be defined in the context of the developing inclusion policy. The role they play in collaborating with other schools should be extended and the funding formula should be rationalised (paragraphs 110 and 111).

119. The time spent in schools by the EPS should be increased (paragraph 112).

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places

120. Analysis of the documentation and relevant indicators show that the LEA meets its statutory duties in this area, but the LEA has not removed enough surplus school places.

121. The level of surplus school places in Doncaster is too high. This was highlighted in the District Audit report of 1996/7 and a more recent report indicates that the situation has got significantly worse, especially in primary schools.

	1997	1999
% unfilled primary places	14	17.7
% primary schools with more than 25% unfilled places	20.3	26.5

122. The position in secondary schools is slightly better, although even here Doncaster is near to or above the national upper quartile on both the above measures.

123. The School Organisation Plan is clear. It uses the LEA's improved school capacity data and forecasting methodology to identify acute surplus place problems. The LEA has begun discussions with schools on removing places. It is now necessary for the LEA to press on with vigour to achieve a much better match between need and provision and so minimise wasted resources.

124. The lack of viability of much of Doncaster's sixth form provision and the need for rationalisation have been reported in Section 2, paragraph 74.

Admissions

125. The provision of sufficient places, admissions information and a catchment area structure has resulted in 94 per cent of parents receiving their first choice of school. Admissions appeals are well below the national lower quartile ranking for both primary and secondary sectors. The LEA will need to monitor the consequences of such policies as the infant class size strategy and removal of

surplus places to ensure that any resulting modification in the pattern of provision does not prejudice the level of parental satisfaction.

Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School

126. Five PRUs provide part-time or full-time education, mainly for pupils who have been permanently excluded from two schools, or have been excluded for a particularly violent offence, or for pupils who are in danger of being excluded. The length of time that pupils stay in a PRU varies. At the time of the inspection half of the 20 pupils in the Key Stage 3 PRU had been there for over six months. The Key Stage 3 PRU has a reasonably good record of reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools, but even so there is some graduation from one secondary PRU to the next as pupils grow older. In part this is probably because the authority does not maintain an EBD special school or resource any EBD provision in mainstream secondary schools. At present pupils who move from the Key Stage 3 PRU to the Key Stage 4 PRUs go from full-time to part-time provision. However, the LEA is taking positive steps to broaden the education provided in the Key Stage 4 PRUs by extending the hours of tuition, and by establishing links with colleges and training agencies. It now needs to look carefully at the feasibility of alternative EBD provision for the most difficult pupils.

127. Whilst the LEA is able to find many excluded pupils another mainstream place within a term or less, through a laudable agreement between all secondary headteachers, some pupils are out of school for several terms while awaiting a place at another school or at a PRU. The LEA has recently established more systematic home tuition for these pupils and wisely intends to extend tuition hours this year. Nevertheless, some pupils are waiting too long for a PRU place in Key Stage 3 because supply does not meet current demand.

Attendance

128. The overall levels of attendance in Doncaster primary schools have been below national levels in two of the last four years, and show no overall trend. The secondary figures, however, have fallen steadily further behind national figures during 1995–98. The 1998 aggregate of 88.1 per cent was well below the national average, and below the average for similar areas. There has been a slight up-turn in 1998/9. Unauthorised absence from secondary schools doubled (to 2.1 per cent) between 1995 and 1998.

129. The Education Welfare Service (EWS), although funded at about the average for metropolitan authorities, has not so far succeeded in helping schools deal with the attendance problem. The school survey shows that, following recent changes, schools are now satisfied with the service. In the past there have been weaknesses. The service provided too little guidance for schools and spent too much time on SEN and welfare issues rather than dealing with attendance problems and legal enforcement. In three of the schools visited, the service had failed to deal with specific problems, in one case identified by the school's OFSTED report.

130. Recent improvements have included deploying the service in proportion to schools' needs and designating an officer to support the PRUs. It is now producing guidance for schools on improving standards and has established a database to identify problems. The service now has a sharper approach to attendance problems. This promises well but the level of attendance in secondary schools is not acceptable.

Behaviour Support

131. Doncaster's secondary schools are, overall, high excluders of pupils: in 1998 the proportion of pupils permanently excluded was twice as high as the national figure, though there has been a significant reduction this year. OFSTED reports also indicate that behaviour in some secondary schools is less good than nationally.

132. The authority's Behaviour Support Plan (BSP), written in 1998, is weak in a number of respects. It sets out general policy but is too vague on detail and fails to measure data about pupils' progress. The relevant sections of the EDP, written a year later, largely remedy these failings. This new account of the overall strategy shows how the various agencies and services work together, how vulnerable pupils will be identified and how teaching and the curriculum will contribute to improving behaviour. This all adds up to a coherent approach which should be articulated in the next version of the BSP.

133. The LEA is developing a good strategy to support schools in improving pupils' behaviour. It already provides Inset which schools regard highly, and this inspection showed that instances of individual support by EWOs, educational psychologists, or local multi-agency liaison are sometimes much appreciated by schools. However, hitherto it has lacked a comprehensive system of preventative support. The LEA has now initiated work intended to improve teachers' skills in behaviour management and in particular has developed a multi-agency social inclusion team which will focus on particular schools and work with pupils at risk.

Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection

134. Arrangements are in place for Child Protection training for school staff but, despite the sound liaison between the Education and Culture Directorate and the Social Service Directorate at senior levels, and the establishment of some liaison groups, several schools visited during this inspection had found contact with caseworkers frustrating. These schools were sometimes left unclear about the action being taken by social workers regarding children at risk.

Looked After Children

135. The council has recently established a good database which will record evidence of the academic progress of looked-after children. This is a significant improvement as some schools had not hitherto been aware of how these pupils' school progress was being monitored.

Ethnic Minority Children

136. The LEA's multi-cultural education centre provides consultancy, advice and resources to schools which are intended to combat racism, improve the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, and provide EAL teaching. The department is currently preparing an anti-racist policy in consultation with local minority ethnic groups.

137. The recent deployment of a specific EWO to work with Traveller children led to improvements in provision, but inspection evidence suggests that a large number of Traveller children of secondary age still are not registered at school.

School Improvement

138. Doncaster faces major problems in providing access to education for all of the pupils of the LEA. The schools have a long way to go, in particular to improve attendance. Progress has been slow so far but the schools are committed to change and most of the schools visited are beginning to improve in the provision they make, if not yet in measurable standards.

Social Exclusion

139. Analysis of documentation and the follow-up of some issues during school visits suggests that the authority takes steps to meet its statutory responsibilities in this area, except that it is not vigorous enough in ensuring that all Traveller pupils are registered at a school and in providing a school or PRU place more speedily for some excluded pupils. Support to improve attendance has, to date, provided poor value. There have been gaps in provision in the past, particularly in behaviour support for pupils before exclusion, but action is in hand to fill the gaps and to work more closely with other agencies. An anti-racism policy is being produced. The authority's new approach to combat social exclusion has yet to become effective.

Recommendations

140. 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 (paragraphs 120-123).

141. Post-16 provision should be rationalised so as to avoid the problems created by small sixth forms (paragraph 124).

142. An assessment should be made of the resource implications of the broad scope of the EWS's work, in order to ensure that it is able to meet fully the LEA's commitment to improving attendance (paragraphs 128-130).

143. Increased effort should be made to ensure that all Traveller children are registered at a school (paragraph 139).

144. The shortage of PRU places at Key Stage 3 should be remedied, if alternative forms of EBD provision are not made (paragraph 126).

145. The LEA's plans to increase the amount of home tuition provided for pupils out of schools should be implemented as soon as possible (paragraph 127).

146. The BSP should be revised to achieve consistency with the EDP and to provide more detail about the provision made or planned (paragraph 132).

APPENDIX

Recommendations

SECTION 1: LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- the Education and Culture Board should continue to review and revise expenditure patterns to ensure that they are consistent with education priorities (paragraphs 31-34);
- the EDP should be improved by developing a more specific programme to increase post-16 participation in education (paragraph 25).

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to make school improvement more effective :

- there should be better, expert support for secondary schools' headteachers (paragraph 44);
- there should be a common approach among inspectors in their work with schools on target setting, to ensure that the targets of all schools are appropriately challenging (paragraphs 38-43);
- schools should be provided with a quality-controlled register of alternative sources of consultancy, advice and evaluation (paragraph 65);
- SPI 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 (paragraph 59);
- more support should be given to improve schools' capacity to evaluate themselves (paragraph 63);
- in the interests of improving attainment and increasing post-16 participation, the work on developing the 14-19 curriculum should be accelerated (paragraphs 71-73).

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve strategic management:

- the place of education should be more clearly and prominently identified in the Council's strategic priorities (paragraph 83);
- the relationship between high level strategy and operational management should be clearer in LEA documentation (paragraphs 83 and 84);

- evaluation should be strengthened by making more use of measurable indicators of success (paragraph 87);
- day-to-day communication between social workers and schools should be strengthened (paragraphs 88 and 134);
- urgent action should assist schools with deficit budgets to recover by producing an agreed formalised action plan (paragraph 96);
- governing bodies should have regular access to budget monitoring data (paragraph 96);
- a programme should be established and implemented to meet schools' increasing diverse needs for ICT development (paragraphs 97-100);

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

In order to improve special education provision:

- there should be a clearer role for the TSS to enable it to play its part in developing and monitoring SEN provision in schools, including the use of newly delegated funds (paragraph 110);
- the role and intake of each special school should be defined in the context of the developing inclusion policy. The role they play in collaborating with other schools should be extended and the funding formula should be rationalised (paragraphs 110 and 111);
- the time spent in schools by the EPS should be increased (paragraph 112).

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve access to education:

- 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 (paragraphs 120-123);
- post-16 provision should be rationalised so as to avoid the problems created by small sixth forms (paragraph 124);
- an assessment should be made of the resource implications of the broad scope of the EWS's work, in order to ensure that it is able to meet fully the LEA's commitment to improving attendance (paragraphs 128-130);
- increased effort should be made to ensure that all Traveller children are registered at a school (paragraph 139);

- the shortage of PRU places at Key Stage 3 should be remedied, if alternative forms of EBD provision are not made (paragraph 126);
- the LEA's plans to increase the amount of home tuition provided for pupils out of schools should be implemented as soon as possible (paragraph 127);
- the BSP should be revised to achieve consistency with the EDP and to provide more detail about the provision made or planned (paragraph 132).

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