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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 representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 110 schools. The response rate was 90 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to eleven primary, one junior, one infant, six secondary, three 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 improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Derbyshire LEA covers a large and diverse geographical area. Unemployment rates are below average, with some wide variations within the County. Pupils' attainment overall is average. Particular features are the large numbers of small schools, and the wide variations in performance between schools, especially in the primary phase. One of the most serious challenges facing the LEA is the relatively high proportion of schools which require special measures, have serious weaknesses, or are causing concern to the LEA.

5. The LEA overall is providing its schools with a service which has more strengths than weaknesses. Improvements in provision have been made over the last few years. Schools are improving at an approximately average rate. Recent improvements in English at Key Stage 2 are better than this. Nevertheless, standards should be higher. The LEA recognises this. This is supported by the evidence of the baseline scores on entry to primary school which are above average. With a few provisos, the schools visited felt they were being well supported by the LEA in their efforts to improve.

6. The LEA and its schools work in a difficult financial climate, in which the Council has had to reduce spending significantly over the last ten years. Although education spending has been maintained at above the level of the Standing Spending Assessment, spending on schools is low by comparison with most other LEAs, particularly in the primary sector.

7. The Education Development Plan outlines a convincing strategy for school improvement and there are few weaknesses. National priorities are reflected well. There is, however, insufficient recognition of the particular problems of small schools and of their need for support. The LEA has rightly concentrated on supporting the large number of schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses. It is successful in enabling many of these schools to improve but the support given is expensive and the cost effectiveness is not assessed. However, too many schools still fell into these two categories during the last year; LEA support was not sufficiently focused or timely enough to prevent this.

8. The LEA is prepared to challenge its schools. The LEA now knows its schools better. It is more able to target support at those experiencing difficulties and to challenge a number of mediocre schools which need to set their sights much higher. However, there are still improvements to be made. For example, some of the school review reports lack sufficient sharpness and focus, and they are not yet routinely presented to governors, although this is planned. This step is needed as part of the drive, already started, to help such schools take responsibility for their own improvement. The LEA would support that process more effectively if it re-examined its current policy of undertaking monitoring visits to all its schools. This should not be necessary in every case.

9. The solid performance of most services is a particular feature of the LEA. Almost all functions are exercised satisfactorily. Those which are particularly effective are:-

- support for literacy;
- support for performance data and target setting;
- preparation of the school organisation and class size plans.

10. There are important weaknesses in the exercise of the following functions:-

- support for governing bodies, including meeting the statutory duty to appoint LEA governors;
- support for curriculum ICT;
- support for the condition and maintenance of school buildings.

11. The leadership of the LEA is very sound. Senior officers plan strategically and have structures and procedures for implementing plans in place. In the main, elected Members contribute effectively, but levels of delegation to officers are not high. With a few exceptions, there is trust between senior officers, elected Members and schools. Over the last few years there has been a shift, both towards listening more to schools and towards a culture where quality of service is of paramount importance. The LEA has the capacity to make progress and tackle the weaknesses identified in the report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Derbyshire LEA covers a large, diverse geographical area and has a school-age population of 115,089. It no longer includes Derby City, which was established as a unitary authority in 1997. A major effect of this reorganisation is that Derbyshire lost its ethnic diversity. Less than one per cent of pupils are from ethnic minorities.

13. Unemployment rates are below the national average but there are some wide variations within the County, from 1.7 per cent in Derbyshire Dales to over 6 per cent in Chesterfield and Bolsover. Entitlement to free school meals is below national average in both primary and secondary schools although this masks considerable variation between schools. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is average in primary schools but above average in secondary schools. There are 14,046 children under five in primary or nursery schools.

14. The LEA currently provides eight nursery schools, 363 primary schools, 47 secondary schools, 13 special schools and 4 pupil referral units. Twenty-five per cent of primary schools have fewer than 90 pupils. A high proportion (46 per cent in 1997/98) of primary classes have more than 30 pupils.

Performance

15. The following general statements illustrate the performance of the schools and the nature of the task facing the LEA:-

- the LEA's baseline assessment data shows that pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is above average in literacy and mathematics. Their personal and social development is average;
- overall attainment is very similar to the national average but this masks wide variations between schools, particularly in the primary phase;
- attainment at Key Stage 2 in 1999 was average in English, mathematics and science;
- between 1996 and 1998, the rate of improvement at Key Stage 2 was average in English, but below average in mathematics. Between 1998 and 1999, this improved to an above average rate in English and an average rate in mathematics;
- results at GCSE are average and are improving at approximately the average rate;
- girls outperform boys in GCSE English by a greater degree than is the case nationally;
- more schools are judged in OFSTED inspections to be good or very good than nationally and fewer secondary schools require much improvement;
- however, significantly more primary schools require much improvement than nationally. Currently 18 schools (13 primary, 3 secondary and 2 special) are in special measures. A further nine schools (eight primary and one special) have serious weaknesses. Many of these schools are in North East Derbyshire;

- attendance is above average in primary schools and usually average in secondary schools, although it fell below in 1998;
- the rate of permanent exclusions is below average in primary and secondary schools, but above average in special schools.

Funding

16. The County Council has faced significant difficulties in funding terms over the last 10 years. Revenue spending had to be reduced steadily as a result of the application of government capping limits. In addition to the restrictions imposed by the capping limits, the Council has not had significant reserves to call upon.

17. The Council has argued its case for higher funding with the government over a number of years and achieved some success for the first time in 1998/99 in the raising of the original capping limit. This improvement in the Council's relative position has been reflected in the increase in Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for 1999/2000 which is amongst the highest for County Councils nationally. The level of education SSA per pupil nonetheless still compares unfavourably with that of most other counties.

18. Education spending has been reduced in line with the Council's spending overall, from a position where it was high by national standards to one where it is lower than in most other areas. The Council's spending on education has remained above the level of SSA throughout the period of spending reductions. The budgets for 1998/99 and 1999/2000 were 101.8 per cent and 101.7 per cent of SSA respectively. Recent increases in SSA have been passed on in full to school delegated budgets. The Council is aware, however, that the high priority given to education has not been reflected in an increase in its share of the overall budget.

19. Overall spending on schools is lower than in most other authorities. This applies to both primary and secondary schools, although the secondary figures are significantly closer to the group averages.

	Primary local schools budget (LSB) / pupil	Secondary local schools budget (LSB) / pupil
Derbyshire	£1987	£2791
Statistical neighbours	£2110	£2821
English counties	£2099	£2811
All English LEAs	£2235	£3006

20. The Council has sought to maximise the opportunities to secure grants as a means of supplementing its income. It has well organised arrangements for informing services of bidding opportunities, supporting the bidding process and co-ordinating its submissions.

21. In terms of capital spending, the Council has sought to supplement its borrowing and grant income by the sale of assets. It is now in a position where it is unlikely to be able to raise significant further sums from this source. It has also

developed proposals for private finance initiative funding and a £54,000,000 scheme has recently been submitted to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Initial approval has so far been given to works totalling £29,000,000.

22. The Council now delegates a higher proportion (82.2 per cent of the LSB) of spending on schools than the average for both County Councils and all LEAs nationally (both 81.6 per cent). Spending on statutory and regulatory duties is below the average for these groups. Spending on each of the other centrally controlled items is not notably high, with the single exception of asset management where a major programme of building surveys is currently being carried out. This will not be necessary on the same scale in years to come.

23. Spending under the school improvement heading is low at £12/pupil compared to an average of £19 for County Councils and £18 for all English LEAs.

24. Within the individual schools' budget (ISB), as with the LSB, the funding of Derbyshire schools is lower than in most LEAs. The primary figures compare significantly less favourably than those for secondaries.

	Primary ISB / pupil	Secondary ISB / pupil
Derbyshire	£1504	£2303
Statistical neighbours	£1611	£2303
English counties	£1609	£2314
All English LEAs	£1691	£2449

25. The primary ISB figure is amongst the lowest in the country, despite the fact that Derbyshire is a relatively 'high delegating' LEA. The large size of primary school classes reflects these funding levels.

26. Spending on special educational needs (SEN) provision does not occupy an unduly large proportion of the LEA's education budget but there have been budgetary control difficulties in recent years, both in terms of overspending and the need to fund substantial budgetary growth from one year to the next. Whilst the LEA has now taken a number of steps which should in time provide a more coherent framework for the funding of SEN provision, and in particular result in less pressure for provision attached to statements of SEN, there are indications that it has accepted too readily in the past that growth in such spending was unavoidable.

Council Structure

27. Derbyshire Council consists of 64 Members (44 Labour, 12 Conservative, 6 Liberal Democrat and two Independent). Education is one of eight committees, and has two sub-committees. The delegation sub-committee meets weekly; some of the matters it considers are at an unnecessary level of detail for Members. There are three cross-party panels, which allow for informal discussion between Members and officers and have a monitoring role. The Council is actively considering modernisation.

The Education Development Plan

28. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is clear and well written. Overall, it presents an effective strategy for school improvement. Three of its key strengths are coherence, consistency and realism. It is coherent in that most, if not all, strands reinforce the others. It is consistent because in all areas there is a conscious mapping of the structure from strategy to delivery through targets. Whilst not all strands are equally strong, the great majority demonstrate structures for ensuring that thoughts are translated into effective actions. Finally, it is realistic because the strategies, priorities, activities and targets command the general support of the schools: this reflects the general effectiveness of the EDP consultation.

29. The EDP reflects national priorities very well. Although based on a reasonable audit of the LEA's schools, the plan does not take sufficient account of all local needs. There is too little account taken within the priorities of the needs of small schools, even though 25 per cent of Derbyshire's 363 primary schools have fewer than 90 pupils. However, the plan does take account of the need to improve the relatively high proportion of Derbyshire's schools which are in special measures or have serious weaknesses.

30. The targets set in the EDP for literacy, numeracy, GCSE and other indicators are suitably challenging and realistic. In 1999, good progress was made towards achieving the targets set for Year 2002. For example, the provisional English results at Key Stage 2 increased by six per cent to a total of 71 per cent of pupils now at Level 4 or above, leaving 10 per cent to go to reach the 2002 target. Similarly, the large improvement of 10 per cent in the Key Stage 2 mathematics results, which reflects the national picture, leaves the LEA seven per cent short of the 2002 target.

31. The priorities set for school improvement are clear. They are, in no priority order:

- improving standards in literacy;
- improving standards in numeracy;
- improving standards in ICT and using ICT to support teaching and learning;
- improving the quality of school leadership and management;
- improving the quality of teaching;
- action with schools causing concern;
- raising standards for under-achieving groups;
- improving pupil motivation and behaviour management to reduce exclusions and improve attendance.

32. The activities in support of the priorities are clearly and logically set out. Those for literacy and numeracy are particularly strong although those for the final two priorities are more vague. There are also detailed plans for implementing the activities. Responsibilities are always made clear and success criteria are usually specific and measurable. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are adequate. These require lead officers to report on progress with each activity within an annual planning framework. Reports are made to an EDP strategy group of officers and advisers as well as termly to the Members' panel on achievement and standards and yearly to the education committee.

33. The EDP builds on, and is consistent with, the Millennium EDP, published in January 1998 following extensive consultation. Much of the development work for the EDP was carried out by working parties consisting of headteachers and officers. Recommendations from these groups went to a wider consultation with all headteachers and governor representatives in a series of meetings in the autumn of 1998. This confirmed broad support for the plan; schools added ICT as a priority.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

34. Within the constraints of a tight budget, on the whole resources are adequately targeted on priorities. Useful work has been done over the last two years by working groups of officers and headteachers to review the LEA's approach to delegated funding. This has been based on a "needs led" analysis of schools' spending requirements. The implementation of the conclusions of this analysis has been inhibited by the absence of significant growth funding and the reluctance to move money from one sector to another, given that both primary and secondary schools have low funding by national standards. The quality of the analytical work has been generally well received, but the absence of concrete progress in funding terms has led to understandable frustration on the part of schools.

35. The needs led analysis has recently been used, in part at least, to guide the targeting of the limited growth possible within the ISB and seems likely to be of more substantial value still in respect of the growth anticipated in the years to come. The needs led analysis has thus far not been extended to the funding of special schools and this would be a beneficial next step.

36. The Council has taken a number of steps to ensure that value for money is received from education spending. It has taken early steps to apply the principles of Best Value in studies of particular parts of the education service and has now drawn up a five year programme of review covering all aspects of its work. Although there has not been a common framework for performance review prior to this, discussions with individual service managers revealed appropriate use of cost benchmarking and performance indicator information as well as market testing. Until now, the surveying of schools' views has been less well developed, although there have been questionnaires seeking views on some support services during the last year. These have supplemented the views sought from headteachers in area and forum meetings as well as in working groups. The LEA does not assess the cost effectiveness of the support given to schools causing concern (see paragraph 58).

Recommendation

37. In order to improve the LEA strategy for school improvement:-

- the EDP should take more account of the need to support small schools (paragraph 29).

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

38. School improvement is in general soundly supported by the LEA's activities in relation to SEN and access. Services such as personnel contribute positively to school improvement, by giving good support in important areas such as headteacher appointments, and competency issues. Governor support services give effective support to schools causing concern, but otherwise there are weaknesses in this area and in support for school buildings. Other management services make an effective contribution to school improvement.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

39. In the main, the LEA is successfully providing its schools with monitoring, challenge, intervention and support, although the LEA recognises that standards of attainment should be higher than they are. The Quality Development Dialogue is Derbyshire's main strategy for improving all schools, for providing monitoring, challenge and support, and for identifying when intervention and/or additional support are required. Link advisers visit primary, nursery and special schools termly to monitor and support school improvement activities, including support for school self-review; they visit secondary schools at least annually. They have a pivotal role in implementing and monitoring the key aspects of the EDP, and in undertaking individual school improvement reviews culminating in a summary of standards and quality for each school.

40. The advisory and inspection service, now much reduced in size, has responsibility for implementing and developing the Quality Development Dialogue. The service is well led, with clear procedures and careful planning. The service has overseen the development of the basic advisory role from subject specialist to school improvement consultant. In the recent past, significantly more primary advisers have been recruited to the service and the entire service has undertaken a significant staff development programme, including reviewing the progress of individuals' work. Most advisers have an appropriate level of experience and expertise, which is being extended in new areas such as literacy and numeracy.

41. In 15 of the 16 schools visited where support for raising standards was judged, the overall judgement was that this was satisfactory or better; it was good in half. However, in seven of the schools where support overall was judged satisfactory, there were one or more areas of weakness. Eleven of the schools visited drew particular attention to the good quality of support received from the link adviser, including many of those schools which either have been, or are, schools causing concern. Although some schools certainly found the level of challenge incorporated in the link adviser's new role initially uncomfortable, it is now largely accepted and welcomed. At present, there is a basic entitlement of at least one visit a year for every secondary school and a visit a term for every primary school. It is not clear that such an entitlement is necessary or desirable in every case. The LEA should seek schools' views and reconsider this. In at least two of the schools there was some evidence of over-monitoring and in one the support given had not encouraged

autonomy. Overall, the advisory and inspection service provides sound value for money.

42. The LEA targets its work at areas of greatest need. Its work with schools causing concern is reported in paragraphs 53 – 59. Through the Quality Development Dialogue, the LEA identifies and challenges schools which are deteriorating, and those which are mediocre and need to raise their sights. It targets support at deteriorating schools but has not yet always succeeded in enabling management and governors to raise standards in mediocre schools. The school improvement record is not routinely given to governors, although this is planned. Finally, there has not been sufficient recognition so far of the particular problems faced by small schools, or sufficient support for them.

Collection and Analysis of Data

43. LEA support for the use of performance data and target setting pre-dates the EDP by several years. It is a key activity which the LEA pursues with increasing success. The data sent to schools are well chosen. There is an established framework for target setting which is effective. In the last year, the LEA identified the need to renegotiate literacy targets upwards in a comparatively large number of schools. A dialogue with the schools led to increases in about 20.

44. In almost all of the primary and secondary schools visited the provision of performance data and support for target setting were judged to be good. They were satisfactory in the remainder. Five of the primary schools visited achieved results in 1999 which exceeded the year 2000 targets. Usually the schools were due to reconsider their targets or had already discussed the issue with their link adviser. Data are not provided for special schools. In at least two schools work had started with the LEA on developing alternative methods of target setting.

Support for Literacy

45. The activities in the EDP to support literacy are wide ranging and well chosen. Promotion of the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark is a particular feature. Curriculum support materials include guidance on raising the achievement of boys in English.

46. The support provided to schools is good. Eleven visits took place to inspect support for literacy; it was good in most and never less than satisfactory. The training received in connection with the National Literacy Strategy was with a few exceptions felt by the schools to be of a high quality. Literacy consultants are well regarded by schools and have given good support, including good quality demonstration lessons. Link advisers have observed and commented on literacy lessons as part of their role in monitoring implementation of the strategy. The schools identified for intensive support, in particular, have benefited from the support received. Improvements include better planning and better teaching, for example of phonics. There is early evidence that pupils involved in the Key Stage 3 literacy project are attaining levels higher than similar pupils who are not part of it.

47. Initially the LEA did not adequately recognise the need to provide help to small schools with multi-age classes. It has now provided some guidance on planning and

adjusted consultants' workloads, partly to give small schools more support. Despite this, small schools have not yet received enough support and guidance in tailoring the literacy strategy to their particular circumstances.

Support for Numeracy

48. Support for schools is sound overall, although there are a few weaknesses. Support was satisfactory in almost all of the 12 schools visited. In the main, the training for the National Numeracy Strategy has been good, although there was some unevenness in quality between courses. The training covered mixed-age classes, but schools still need further guidance in this area.

49. Several schools have already received effective support from a numeracy consultant. This includes highly effective modelling of lessons for staff to observe in one primary school identified for intensive support, and knowledgeable support received by a special school. However, some schools, including an 'intensive' school, did not know what support they could expect from their numeracy consultant. Staff in the secondary schools find attendance at the annual conference for heads of mathematics relevant and worthwhile. There was some disappointment that the event did not take place last year.

Support for ICT

50. Standards in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) were identified as a key issue for improvement in 37 per cent of schools inspected in 1997/98. The Millennium EDP includes a target of 80 per cent of Key Stage 2 pupils achieving level 4 and better by 2001. This figure was not based on an audit of pupils' attainment but there are plans to do this in future. Other supporting activities are appropriate.

51. In the schools visited, some aspects of support for ICT were judged to be satisfactory but there are also important weaknesses. Delay in securing resources for the LEA's contribution to phase one of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) telescoped implementation activity on that phase into the last two months of the last financial year. The complications of providing over a hundred full networks in such a brief period have meant that a few schools have had troubles with implementation and there have been some repercussions on services this year. The training provided was useful although not very well adjusted to course members' individual needs. The current year (second phase) budget is fully secured and work is proceeding on time.

52. The LEA's technical support service, which is paid for by schools when they need it, was judged by most schools visited to be good. However, schools have not always received helpful advice on buying additional equipment. Although schools have received some guidance on preparation of the school's development plan for ICT, there is insufficient practical assistance and support to ensure schools recognise the implications of the options open to them, including how they might fund the future of NGfL.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

53. Currently, 13 primary, three secondary and two¹ special schools are in special measures. A further eight primary schools and one special school have been identified as having serious weaknesses. Twenty-two additional schools are on the LEA's list of schools causing concern. This is a major area of concern and focus of activity for the LEA.

54. Direct support to schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses is co-ordinated by a support group consisting of a senior adviser, school support officer, lead adviser for the school, headteacher and chair of governors. The job of the group is to target support according to need and to monitor progress against the action plan.

55. Seven schools were visited to inspect the support received by schools causing concern. Four of the schools had received good support and two satisfactory support. In one school the support given, although copious, had not been well focused or effective.

56. The LEA often made a major contribution by helping to stabilise staffing including giving effective support on competency issues where required. Three of the schools benefited from being allocated seconded acting headteachers and deputy headteachers, who could take the action plan forward pending permanent appointments. Extra teachers were funded to give the headteacher additional non-contact time. All the schools had received considerable and usually very effective extra support from the link adviser. This included guidance on drawing up the action plan, support for the headteacher in monitoring teaching and learning, and support for particular teachers. The support from different advisers and school support officers was in most cases good.

57. In one school, although generous support was given, it had not enabled the headteacher to take responsibility for managing the school more effectively. In another case, the advisory support had not been well enough co-ordinated, and although some advisers had given teachers effective support, others had simply left a list of tasks to do. Sometimes it has taken too long to fill governor vacancies or appoint additional governors where needed. Some schools had received additional monitoring visits by senior advisers which largely duplicated the monitoring being carried out by the link advisers and by HMI. The LEA has now discontinued this unnecessary extra layer of monitoring.

58. The large amount of support provided to each school is very expensive. Although the LEA evaluates the effectiveness of the support in bringing about improvement, it does not assess its cost effectiveness.

59. In the last year, following HMI visits, four schools have been removed from special measures and five have been judged to have remedied serious weaknesses. Although this constitutes good progress for these particular schools, an exactly equal number of schools were placed in each of the two categories over the same

¹ Since the conclusion of the inspection one special school has closed.

timescale. These schools had not received effective support. Through the Quality Development Dialogue, the LEA now knows which of its schools are in difficulties and require additional support. Schools on the causing concern list are receiving targeted support and their progress is being monitored. The LEA is taking steps to ensure that the governors assume responsibility for improvement; in future, the review report is to be given to governors. In the last year, 12 schools have made sufficient improvement to be removed from the LEA's own causing concern list.

Support for Governors

60. Support for governors was inspected in 15 of the schools visited. Although it was mainly satisfactory and sometimes good, there were particular areas of weakness. Good support was received for appointing headteachers, dealing with deficit budgets, dealing with competency and almost always for schools with serious weaknesses or in special measures. Training was usually well regarded by those who attended, but a number of courses were under-subscribed and had to be cancelled. Courses held in school which all governors could attend were regarded as particularly helpful. These were often arranged to help schools in particular difficulties. Occasionally, weak governing bodies were not being given sufficient focused help to become more autonomous.

61. Outside the context of schools with particular difficulties, communication and consultation with governors are in general weak. Governors feel that they receive complex documents without well focused briefing to help them prioritise and understand them. Tight deadlines for consultation make it difficult for chairs to consult with other governors. There are no effective arrangements for consulting with governors or their representatives at an early stage in the development of plans and policies. Governors are not aware of recent changes in arrangements, for example that area governors' meetings will no longer be held. Governors are also finding it difficult to get hold of the 'starting pack' for new governors. The property manual for schools does explain to governors their role in relation to property maintenance.

62. There are at present too many vacancies for LEA governors (320 or 25 per cent in July 1999) and the LEA is not meeting its statutory duty in this respect. The LEA has also been concerned about the quality of some governing bodies and governors, including governors' understanding of their role. To help bring about improvements in both of these areas of concern, changes have been made to the way in which LEA governors are recruited. These changes were approved by Members and came into effect in September 1999. They appropriately broaden the pool from which LEA governors can be recruited, and make what is expected of such governors clear. This is already having an effect; by the end of September vacancies had been reduced by 38. Training courses on the respective roles of governors, clerks to governors and headteachers have also been provided.

63. From autumn 1999, the LEA has plans to hold regular briefings for LEA governors, at no charge, as a way of strengthening communication between the LEA and governing bodies.

Support for School Management

64. Derbyshire has more secondary schools requiring some improvement in management than other LEAs. In primary schools, leadership, management and teaching are often identified as key issues. The EDP priorities cover an appropriate range of support. Schools can also buy in services such as support for development planning and post-OFSTED action planning.

65. Support in these areas was effective in all except two of the schools visited. In particular, schools were benefiting from the support for target setting, self-evaluation and lesson observation offered through the Quality Development Dialogue. Link advisers were almost always well regarded by headteachers, and had often provided encouragement and support for cascading the training within schools. Headteacher appraisal was also having a positive effect.

66. Three schools had benefited from training provided for NQTs and for mentors, but in two schools the training for NQTs had been too limited or not available. Schools felt that the INSET courses available from the LEA were usually of good quality, but that the range offered was too limited. There are few courses available, for example, which meet the needs of secondary heads of department, many of whom are long-serving. Schools realise, with some regret, that the LEA lacks the staff to provide a full range of courses, and are increasingly looking to other providers. The LEA does not give advice on courses provided elsewhere. Where schools bought in specific training from advisers, this almost always met needs well.

67. There were a few other weaknesses. The management needs of headteachers from small schools were not always being met. Occasionally, the support given is not helping schools to become autonomous. The activities in the EDP concerning the sharing of good practice are not having much impact yet, except in the case of schools causing concern.

Recommendations

68. In order to improve LEA support for school improvement:-

- the policy of making monitoring visits to all schools should be reconsidered;
- plans to present the school improvement review report to governors should be implemented (paragraphs 39-42).

69. In order to provide better support for literacy and numeracy:-

- more effective support should be given to small schools with multi-age classes;
- schools should be made aware of the support they can expect in relation to numeracy (paragraphs 45-49).

70. In order to provide better support for ICT:-

- schools should be provided with advice on a long-term replacement strategy for existing software and hardware, and on how they are to fund the future of NGfL (paragraphs 50-52).

71. In order to improve the support given to schools causing concern:-

- the cost effectiveness of the support given to schools causing concern should be evaluated;
- the support given to schools causing concern should encourage autonomy;
- effective support should be given to schools at risk either of being made subject to special measures or identified as having serious weaknesses (paragraphs 53-59).

72. In order to promote better school governance:-

- plans to appoint more LEA governors should be implemented as a matter of urgency;
- ways should be found of consulting and communicating more effectively with governors (paragraphs 60-63).

73. In order to improve the support for management:-

- adequate support for middle managers in secondary schools should be provided or secured (paragraphs 64-67).

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

74. The overall Council plan, which was formulated in 1997/98, clearly sets out the authority's vision, values and key aims. It has defined targets and provides a framework for the rest of the Council's planning. The LEA's own planning fits within this and is clear and coherent.

75. The Millennium EDP was published in January 1998 following extensive consultation. It indicates a broad vision of education. It sets out the purposes of the LEA and its values, key policies, goals and targets for 2001. The plan was amended in 1999 to emphasise the goals concerned with standards, social inclusion and best value and to bring the targets into line with those set nationally. All the LEA's statutory and non-statutory plans are consistent with and clearly cross-referenced to the Millennium EDP. The plans are competent, realistic and are in various stages of implementation.

76. The Early Years and Childcare Development Plan has been submitted to and approved by the DfEE. The plan incorporates clear principles derived from a thorough audit of existing provision and is accompanied by a detailed and extensive plan for implementation.

77. An application to set up an EAZ in the NE Derbyshire Coalfields has recently been approved. It is in an area of social deprivation and low educational attainment.

78. The schools visited approve of the LEA's strategy and priorities but a few schools felt that provision for post-16 education and meeting the needs of small schools should be given higher priority.

79. Leadership of the education service is very sound. Members are well advised by senior officers. The chair of education and the chief executive are both seeking to sharpen decision making and to continue the change, already some way advanced, to a culture where the quality of service is paramount.

80. Over the last few years a good degree of trust has been established between elected Members, senior officers and schools. There are a few exceptions. One was over a reorganisation proposal earlier this year. Others are related to the LEA's relationship with its schools, particularly its small schools (see paragraph 42) and the increasing challenge offered to schools (see paragraph 41).

81. Appropriately, the Council is now moving its budget planning on to a three year basis, following receipt from the government of a clear indication of likely funding levels over that period. The annual corporate budget making processes will start earlier than in the past, to allow more time for scrutiny and review and so that schools can have earlier notification of their budgets. Delays in the past have caused schools problems, even though officers have sought to give schools indicative predictions as early as possible.

82. The LEA consults appropriately with schools over its budget making. A notable feature has been the detailed explanation given of the use of centrally controlled funding. However, the relative absence thus far of significant funding changes to reflect the views expressed during consultation has tended to undermine schools' confidence in the process. Consultation on Fair Funding has been thorough, with appropriately detailed information being provided to schools. A key reservation concerns the timing of consultation and decision making. For 1999/2000 the process of establishing buy back arrangements with schools was still going on in the summer term, some weeks after the start of the financial year. It is important that a similar cycle is not repeated this year.

83. The detailed management of budgets involves Members to a greater extent than in many other LEAs, which is perhaps not surprising given the financial constraints of recent years, the absence of significant reserves and the consequent need for tight financial control. Whilst such control must remain an important feature of the Council's work for the foreseeable future, LEA managers have not always been allowed sufficient autonomy to ensure that service delivery is flexible and responsive to need. As education support services are increasingly being delivered to schools on a buy back basis, granting greater autonomy to officers will also be important for maintaining the financial viability of those services.

84. Consultation with schools is in general thorough, and was particularly so for the EDP. Schools feel that, over the last few years, the LEA has been increasingly prepared to listen. One criticism by schools is that sometimes they are involved very late; for example over consultation on SEN. Consultation with governors is weak and is dealt with in paragraph 61.

85. Evaluation is generally sound. Corporate plans are evaluated by consideration of performance indicators against success criteria; and via the Best Value procedures. Members' panels evaluate the school improvement strategy and service delivery. The chief executive holds monthly meetings with all chief officers, which include a quarterly review of progress. Schools have been asked to evaluate a range of services but there is not a systematic framework for this. There was some lack of precision in the evaluation of standards recorded in the latest annual report.

Partnerships with Other Agencies and Local Government Departments

86. The LEA faces a real challenge in relating consistently and positively to three training and enterprise Councils, two chambers of commerce, two careers' services and three education/business partnerships. It meets this challenge successfully and all partners co-operate well in the interests of improving the education service locally, for example, in developing a network of pre-school and post-school literacy provision which reinforces the LEA's work in its statutory literacy strategy. There are also valuable work experience initiatives for young people with SEN.

87. The LEA has effective links with the social services department, the police and the three health authorities which serve the area. As with the business partnerships, links with the health authorities are complex as the County is served by three different authorities, two of which work with two or more education authorities. This

makes strategic co-ordination of policies and plans time-consuming and difficult. The LEA contributes to the development of relevant statutory plans of each organisation but strategic plans are too often developed separately. There is, however, productive collaboration on more specific operational and service matters. At the strategic level relationships with the social services department are good but they are sometimes weak between schools and social workers. The early years partnerships are active and productive.

Management Services

88. Management services are in general effective. Personnel, support for financial management and home to school transport for pupils with SEN are particularly so. Administrative ICT provision is good in primary schools. The school meals service is cost effective. Property maintenance, cleaning and grounds maintenance services have weaknesses.

89. Schools have a high regard for the personnel support provided. The response to queries is prompt and the support given is considered to be reliable and effective. A comprehensive guidance manual is provided for schools. Much recent work has focused on school improvement, including very effective support for capability and competence procedures. There is an employee welfare service which is well appreciated. The LEA also makes a major input to headteacher and deputy appointments. It has been responding in this to concerns about the quantity and quality of applicants for posts.

90. The LEA has acknowledged that it was some way behind when it finally filled its administrative ICT officer post 18 months ago. This had previously been held vacant for some years for budgetary reasons. Prior to the appointment the concentration had been on supporting schools' use of ICT, at the expense of developing central systems.

91. The key thrust of the draft ICT strategy is the creation of a central school and pupil database. This will not be fully operational until March 2001. There was no school involvement in drawing up the draft strategy but it has recently been sent to all schools for comment. There is a termly administrative ICT newsletter which includes information, reminders about key tasks and deadlines, and references to good practice in the County. This is well received in schools. User support, advice on further purchases, and the hardware maintenance service are all well regarded.

92. Support for financial management is well regarded, particularly by primary schools. The LEA is proactive and rigorous in its monitoring of school budgets. Other issues are dealt with in response to requests and on regular school visits. The need for such frequent visits to all schools is questionable. In preparing for the delegation of funding next year the LEA intends to offer a range of options to reflect schools' differing needs. Accounting arrangements and payroll services work well.

93. For property management, the LEA is on schedule for meeting the government's asset management planning requirements. Its activities over a number of years have not, however, matched up to the good practice enshrined in those requirements. The Asset Management Plan and the Local Policy Statement

are in preparation and will be submitted on time. A major buildings survey exercise is currently under way to ensure that the LEA can submit basic premises information and condition assessments by the March 2000 deadline. Opportunities for dialogue with schools and for observing the condition of buildings have been taken in the course of other work and hence it would be wrong to say that the LEA had no knowledge of needs outside those requiring an urgent response. The fact that a major programme of surveys has had to be commissioned to comply with asset management plan requirements indicates the extent to which the LEA has not been systematically collecting information about the condition of its school buildings for some years. Essentially it has been operating in response to urgent requests made by schools. The extent of the backlog of maintenance work is estimated by the LEA to be some £70m and this has not changed significantly in recent years. Revenue expenditure on structural repairs and maintenance in 1998/99 (£47/pupil) was significantly above the average for County Councils and all English LEAs (£31/pupil for both). However, capital expenditure, which in part at least includes remedial and replacement works on buildings, was lower than elsewhere (£95/pupil compared to £124 and £126).

94. Schools can purchase client agent support from the property services department for building maintenance work. They can also approach the Council's Direct Labour Organisations directly. Opinion amongst schools about the support provided is mixed but overall less than satisfactory, particularly in respect of the Direct Labour Organisations. Support in emergency situations is acknowledged to be good, but there are some reservations otherwise about speed of response, quality, and cost.

95. Schools are currently able to get client agent support for grounds maintenance and cleaning from the LEA. This includes drawing up contract specifications and support in letting contracts but not for contract supervision. Services can be purchased from the LEA's Direct Labour Organisations. Opinion about the quality of service is again mixed.

96. The LEA has succeeded in making substantial reductions in net expenditure on school meals over recent years, through a combination of cost cutting measures and price increases. The quality of provision has not, however, been compromised. The take-up of meals is good and the service makes a significant contribution to the LEA's anti-poverty and healthy eating strategies.

97. Net expenditure on home to school transport is not high by comparison with other counties. The SEN transport budget is held by the education SEN managers, thus ensuring that placement and transport costs are considered together. A specialist group within the environmental services department deals with SEN transport and keeps route planning under close review as needs change, which is an important factor in minimising costs. SEN transport is particularly well regarded by schools.

Recommendations

98. In order to improve the effectiveness of decision making:-

- consultation on further delegation next year and the development of associated buy back arrangements should be pursued with minimum delay;
- a higher level of delegation by Members to officers should be agreed (paragraphs 82-83).

99. In order to improve the quality of the services offered:-

- steps should be taken to survey in detail schools' views of the services offered by the Council's Direct Labour Organisations (paragraphs 94-95).

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

100. The LEA's strategy for SEN is sound. The LEA has recently reviewed its policy and circulated a new draft policy to consolidate existing principles. The principles, together with those in the Millennium EDP and the EDP, are translated into detailed short and medium-term priorities in the Learning Support Division Development Plan.

101. The priorities are based on an accurate assessment of the issues which the LEA faces. The two major priorities are the development of an appropriate role for special schools in the context of the broadly inclusive policies, and proposals intended to support earlier intervention and thereby to reduce the need to apply for statements. The LEA's intention is that these planned developments will help to achieve a better management of the budget. In addition, priorities identify the need to improve statements of SEN by focusing on improvements in pupils' attainment; to improve liaison with parents through the appointment of a parent partnership officer; and, to update ICT systems to provide better management information so that the outcomes of the provision can be monitored and evaluated.

102. Implementation is slow. Timescales and resources to implement the priorities have not been clearly identified in the plan but, even so, progress in implementation has been much slower than the LEA and schools expected. Measurable progress has been made only on the final priority.

103. The two major priorities are known to the schools and have widespread support. However, consultation with schools often occurs when solutions to the problems have been found and consultation can then appear as seeking ratification for existing proposals.

104. The number of parental appeals which have been made on the placement of pupils with SEN is low. The LEA has recently drafted some helpful and informative leaflets for parents. Parents and their representatives recognise that the LEA is receptive to individual cases, but confirm that the development of a parent-partnership service would enable the LEA to involve parents in a more profitable dialogue on the development of provision.

Statutory Obligations

105. The LEA is taking reasonable steps to discharge its statutory duties for SEN.

Improvement and Value for Money

106. The LEA performs the functions for SEN satisfactorily; they make a sound contribution to school improvement. Support for individual pupils provides at least satisfactory value for money. The value for money of special needs assessment and issue of statements can be improved if the number of referrals and statements issued is reduced by providing a more effective intervention for pupils at stage three.

Analysis

107. Over the last year the percentage of statements issued within advisory time limits has increased from the unacceptably low level of seven per cent to 77 per cent. The quality of statements is at least satisfactory and often better. A consistent LEA system is used to discuss and review the pupils' progress in all but one of the schools visited. This system includes regular meetings between the school and supporting professionals. Schools have received very good practical guidance on devising and monitoring individual education plans. Individual education plans set precise targets, translate the requirements of the statement accurately, and go further than the statement in focusing on improvements in attainment. SEN co-ordinators are well supported by training and advice. There is an effective programme for the training of education care officers (classroom assistants).

108. The schools visited recognised the value of the improvements and of the support. Nevertheless the demand for statements is still too high. With the exception of behaviour problems, virtually no additional intervention is made at stage three of the code of practice apart from the advice of the educational psychologist. The amount of additional support which is provided for a few pupils with statements does not warrant the complex and expensive statementing procedure now being used. The LEA has no criteria or cross school moderation to ensure appropriate thresholds for the stages of the code of practice. The moderation system looks at the level of provision and the most effective use of resources. Moderators do not consider whether clear criteria have been consistently applied or whether support meets the requirements of the statements and leads to effective outcomes. Neither do they monitor the school's expenditure for SEN. Moderators do, however, provide training, support and advice, which are invariably valued by schools.

109. Specialist SEN support services are effective. All but one school reported that the educational psychology service provides effective support. Services for sensory impaired pupils and the primary support teaching service (PSTS) are highly regarded for their expertise. However, schools are not always clear about the criteria used to deploy the PSTS. Schools reported that pupils made good progress in the one to one support sessions provided by the service. However, the organisation of the support does not always allow schools to deploy it in the most flexible way or enhance their capability to improve the inclusion of pupils in classrooms.

110. The budget allocated for special needs is average when compared with other similar LEAs, although there has been overspend in the last two years. In the last year, the substantial budget for educational care officers was delegated to schools. The budgets for the support services including the PSTS are centrally retained. Most schools are content with the levels of delegation for SEN; only four of the schools visited stated that they would prefer higher levels of delegation.

111. The LEA is taking appropriate steps to improve the monitoring of policies and procedures to ensure that they provide value for money. ICT systems are being up-dated to enable better monitoring. A Best Value review is taking place on the issue and review of statements. The PSTS is the focus of a further forthcoming review.

Recommendations

112. In order to improve the management of SEN:-

- appropriate timescales should be established for the development and implementation of strategic priorities;
- the mechanisms whereby schools and parents can be included in discussions about the development of special needs policies and provision should be improved;
- more effective, preventive intervention strategies should be developed at stage three of the code of practice;
- criteria and moderation procedures for each of the stages of the code of practice should be developed to help to ensure consistent implementation;
- in the light of increased delegation of funding, improvements should be made to the way in which schools' expenditure for SEN is monitored (paragraphs 100-110).

SECTION 5: ACCESS

113. Overall, the LEA is taking reasonable steps to meet its statutory requirements.

The Supply of School Places

114. The LEA's overall performance in this area of work is good. Effective action has been taken to reduce the number of surplus places and a major programme of action is under way to meet the government's Key Stage 1 class size target. Planning and consultation procedures are in line with current government requirements. In both its school organisation and infant class size plans the LEA has a sound strategic overview as well as a command of the detail of action planning.

115. The percentage of unfilled places in the primary sector has been reduced from 13.1 per cent in 1994/95 to 8.7 per cent now. The equivalent secondary figures are 19.2 per cent and 9.9 per cent. For both sectors the current figures are below the averages for County Councils and all English LEAs.

116. The school organisation plan was approved by the newly formed school organisation committee at the end of September. It includes detailed and comprehensive analyses of projected need and school capacity by local area; an explicit policy statement on small schools; and a short, clear summary of the anticipated need for action in each area.

117. The LEA's first class size plan was submitted to the DfEE on schedule and approved. Proposals for action were developed in consultation with the primary headteachers' forum. Consultation was very wide ranging and the plan received strong support from schools. The plan is methodical, detailed and readable. The LEA secured very substantial funding, both capital and revenue, as a result of its submission being approved.

118. The success in securing government funding under programmes like the class size initiative is testimony to the number of schools with overcrowded or otherwise unsuitable premises. The LEA is pursuing with schools a proposal to bring the additional revenue funding associated with meeting the class size limits into the framework of the LMS formula. This should bring greater consistency and stability to the allocation of funding than has been possible thus far.

Admissions

119. The LEA consults appropriately with its partners in the planning of admissions arrangements, administers its own admissions processes efficiently, and is taking further action to try to improve the co-ordination of arrangements.

120. Arrangements for admissions based on the 1998 Act took place effectively and on schedule. The first meeting of the local admissions forum is planned for November.

121. The LEA's information booklet for parents on admissions for 1999/2000 meets the minimum requirements of the new admissions code of practice, but is deficient in

a number of respects, for example with regard to information for parents applying for over-subscribed schools.

Provision of Education other than at School

122. The LEA is taking thoughtful and suitable steps to perform its function for providing education otherwise than at school. In the last academic year 454 pupils received alternative education, either because they had no school place or because they could not attend school. Roughly three quarters of the children receive home tuition and a quarter attend college or Step Forward, a joint LEA and Community Enterprise Training Agency project. A high proportion of the children have emotional and mental health problems.

123. Access to provision is monitored through three area inter-agency management groups. These include representation from support services, schools, social services and health authorities. The systems are tight and monitoring is thorough and accurate. The management of the provision is good, when compared with most other LEAs nationally. Nevertheless there are still two significant weaknesses. Firstly, pupils receive home tuition for only four hours weekly with sometimes a delay of as much as five weeks before they receive provision. Secondly, 77 children, including some young children, have received limited alternative education for longer than one year.

124. The LEA has taken reasonable steps to improve the quality and organisation of home tuition by appointing a home tuition co-ordinator, and locating oversight and monitoring of education otherwise provision within the remit of the behaviour support service. In line with the government's requirement to provide full-time tuition for pupils who are out of school by the year 2002, the LEA has well advanced plans to open two new, full-time pupil referral units for excluded pupils. Sites for the units have been secured. Attached to one pupil referral unit is an imaginative plan to develop an inter-disciplinary team to work with children, families and schools to accelerate re-integration into school. The LEA has a plan to enhance and improve the provision for young mothers by appointing childminders to work with the most needy young women. The childminders will provide child care to guarantee access to education and also to support the development of effective parenting skills.

125. The seventy-seven children who have received education otherwise for more than one year include some of the most complex and difficult cases which require extensive multi-disciplinary support. Nevertheless, in one or two cases scrutinised, the agencies are not taking sufficiently incisive action with the result that parents and children are successfully evading full-time education.

Attendance

126. Attendance rates are generally satisfactory across the LEA although there was a sudden dip in the attendance in secondary schools in 1998-1999. The priority in the EDP identifies activities to monitor and work with schools in difficulties. The service is energetic and effective. The schools rate the support as satisfactory. However, the service level agreement is not sufficiently specific to enable effective monitoring.

Behaviour Support

127. The LEA performs its functions of preparing and implementing a Behaviour Support Plan and for the education and management of children with behavioural difficulties effectively. The Behaviour Support Plan combined with the EDP provides a satisfactory approach to improving behaviour and attendance in schools. The plan outlines the national and local context and states clearly what has been achieved and how the existing services work. It illustrates a strong emphasis on inter-disciplinary work. The objectives of the plan, however, are very broad and the timescales and accountability for implementation are not sufficiently precise. The plan requires some up-dating to reflect the recent requirements for school exclusion including pupil support programmes. There are arrangements for monitoring its implementation.

128. Rates of exclusion are lower than national averages with the exception of exclusion from special schools. The rate of permanent and fixed term exclusion has significantly reduced in 1998/99 and the LEA has met and exceeded its target for improvement.

129. The behaviour support service provides support for pupils with behaviour difficulties and advises schools on policies to maintain discipline. This is a new service which was formed two years ago on local government re-organisation. The organisation of the service has many strengths including consistent processes for referral, assiduous use of the code of practice to trigger intervention at stage three and regular reviews of progress. Part-time placements at the pupil referral units are used in combination with school placements to provide intensive support for pupils' behavioural and learning difficulties. Liaison and communication with the schools are effective. However, there are weaknesses in curriculum continuity. This is better at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 3 where consideration of how the curriculum of the unit can inter-relate with and enhance the curriculum of the school is insufficient. The re-integration of pupils into school is supported by an education care officer or by the behaviour support teacher. Rates of successful reintegration are high.

130. The management of the service is very effective. A good framework of consistently applied and clear working practices has been established in a short time. The structure of the service has helped to overcome some of the professional isolation often felt by staff in similar services. This has been achieved through the careful central planning of an in-service training programme and specialist curriculum co-ordination across the service. Workloads are effectively monitored and managed. Written guidance is clear and informative.

131. There are suitable plans for improving the effectiveness of the support. Currently, this is variable although it is recognised that this is a very difficult area to support effectively. The service's own evaluation shows it is very effective in only 55 per cent of cases. This finding is confirmed by the school visits. While there are several illustrations of good support to pupils, overall effectiveness is more patchy. Weaknesses include the variation in the effectiveness of support provided by behaviour support teachers and the procedure whereby exclusion from the school also results in exclusion from the pupil referral unit. There is a need to improve procedures for referral to reduce the percentage of children who are excluded from school and who have not received support. There is also a need to up-date procedures in the light of new DfEE guidance on social inclusion, in particular pastoral support programmes.

Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection

132. The LEA performs its function of protecting children satisfactorily. For the last two years the LEA has not had the services of a specialist officer. This has been rectified very recently. An officer has been appointed who is taking steps to ensure that designated teachers are trained appropriately. The social services department reports that arrangements made by the Education department to ensure the protection of children are suitable. Schools reported that they are well served both by training and support.

Looked-After Children

133. The LEA has put into place suitable foundations for performing its responsibilities for the education of looked-after children. The LEA and social services department have jointly monitored the attainment of looked-after children for three years. The monitoring data is more comprehensive than that found nationally. Nevertheless pupils' attainment is not different from the national picture: the data show a dismal picture of under-achievement. They also show that the under-attainment of looked-after children starts early. Targets have been set for improvement.

134. Elected Members have taken suitable steps to ensure that the local authority's role of corporate parent is adequately discharged. A working group and monitoring committee have been established. An external review of the strategy to raise the attainment of looked-after children has been conducted.

135. The social services department is taking steps to improve educational attainment. The social services education support service has been re-focused to work with looked-after children and in particular to offer training and support to carers on educational issues. The department has adopted a policy whereby placement moves have now been reduced. It has also adopted a strategy of introducing computers with literacy support packages into all children's homes and when possible into foster homes.

136. The LEA's behaviour support service gives priority to supporting looked-after children. The LEA disseminates attainment data on looked-after children annually. It has issued guidance advising schools to designate a teacher to oversee the

progress of looked-after children and has devised a role specification for this post. The schools which were visited for this inspection could all identify the looked-after children on their roll. This is basic but it shows a measurable improvement on the usual practice nationally. Awareness has been raised and, while there is still considerable work to do to lift attainment, there are examples of effective support.

Minority Ethnic Children

137. There are fewer than one hundred children receiving support for English as an additional language in Derbyshire. They receive well organised support. In this, the LEA collaborates appropriately with City of Derby LEA. The strategy includes provision of additional support to a number of existing educational developments, for example literacy. However, the attainment of minority ethnic pupils is not monitored at present. This is required to ensure that support, which is deployed diffusely and is built into existing strategies, targets the children effectively and provides extra value.

138. Children of Gypsy and Traveller heritage receive support from a small service which is also maintained in collaboration with City of Derby LEA. The small service provides sound and effective support although procedures for following up children who are lost to the education system are not sufficiently vigorous.

Social Inclusion

139. The LEA has placed a high priority on promoting social inclusion and is developing some effective and imaginative strategies. It has identified the pupil groups who are at risk of social exclusion, reduced exclusion from school and maintains satisfactory rates of attendance. Co-operation with the police, area health authorities and social services is satisfactory and sometimes good. There is evidence of effective strategic co-ordination and management of policies and services to reduce the risks of social exclusion. The critical areas where the LEA has already planned, yet continues to require, more effective preventive strategies are for the education of children otherwise than at school and the education of looked after children. The LEA is promoting an anti-bullying strategy in schools which includes combating any form of harassment.

Recommendations

140. In order to improve access to education:-

- admissions literature for parents should be reviewed in the light of the advice in the new code of practice on admissions;
- existing plans to increase the amount and quality of the education received by children requiring education otherwise should be implemented urgently;
- appropriate actions should be agreed with other relevant agencies for supporting families who have expended all support available so far and the support has not been effective in ensuring children's access to full time education;
- the protocols for tracking and following up children who are at risk of being lost to the education system should be tightened;

- the procedures for school exclusion and referral to the behaviour support service should be updated in the light of recent DfEE guidance on school exclusion and pupil support programmes;
- the curriculum policy for pupil referral units should be revised in order to achieve better continuity with the curriculum of mainstream schools;
- the vigorous pursuit of policies and practices which raise the attainment of children who are looked after by local authorities should be continued;
- the attainment and attendance of minority ethnic children including Gypsy and Traveller children should be monitored (paragraphs 121-139).

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the LEA strategy for school improvement:-

- the EDP should take more account of the need to support small schools (paragraph 29).

In order to improve LEA support for school improvement:-

- the policy of making monitoring visits to all schools should be reconsidered;
- plans to present the school improvement review report to governors should be implemented (paragraphs 39-42).

In order to provide better support for literacy and numeracy:-

- more effective support should be given to small schools with multi-age classes;
- schools should be made aware of the support they can expect in relation to numeracy (paragraphs 45-49).

In order to provide better support for ICT:-

- schools should be provided with advice on a long-term replacement strategy for existing software and hardware, and on how they are to fund the future of NGfL (paragraphs 50-52).

In order to improve the support given to schools causing concern:-

- the cost effectiveness of the support given to schools causing concern should be evaluated;
- the support given to schools causing concern should encourage autonomy;
- effective support should be given to schools at risk either of being made subject to special measures or identified as having serious weaknesses (paragraphs 53-59).

In order to promote better school governance:-

- plans to appoint more LEA governors should be implemented as a matter of urgency;
- ways should be found of consulting and communicating more effectively with governors (paragraphs 60-63).

In order to improve the support for management:-

- adequate support for middle managers in secondary schools should be provided or secured (paragraphs 64-67).

In order to improve the effectiveness of decision making:-

- consultation on further delegation next year and the development of associated buy back arrangements should be pursued with minimum delay;
- a higher level of delegation by Members to officers should be agreed (paragraphs 82-83).

In order to improve the quality of the services offered:-

- steps should be taken to survey in detail schools' views of the services offered by the Council's Direct Labour Organisations (paragraphs 94-95).

In order to improve the management of SEN:-

- appropriate timescales should be established for the development and implementation of strategic priorities;
- the mechanisms whereby schools and parents can be included in discussions about the development of special needs policies and provision should be improved;
- more effective, preventive intervention strategies should be developed at stage three of the code of practice;
- criteria and moderation procedures for each of the stages of the code of practice should be developed to help to ensure consistent implementation;
- in the light of increased delegation of funding, improvements should be made to the way in which schools' expenditure for SEN is monitored (paragraphs 100-110).

In order to improve access to education:-

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- existing plans to increase the amount and quality of the education received by children requiring education otherwise should be implemented urgently;
- appropriate actions should be agreed with other relevant agencies for supporting families who have expended all support available so far and the support has not been effective in ensuring children's access to full time education;
- the protocols for tracking and following up children who are at risk of being lost to the education system should be tightened;
- the procedures for school exclusion and referral to the behaviour support service should be updated in the light of recent DfEE guidance on school exclusion and pupil support programmes;
- the curriculum policy for pupil referral units should be revised in order to achieve better continuity with the curriculum of mainstream schools;
- the vigorous pursuit of policies and practices which raise the attainment of children who are looked after by local authorities should be continued;
- the attainment and attendance of minority ethnic children including Gypsy and Traveller children should be monitored (paragraphs 121-139).

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