

Inspection report
CITY OF DERBY
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: September 2002

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Basic information about the LEA

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Address of LEA:	Middleton House 27 St Mary's Gate Derby. DE1 3NN
Reporting inspector:	Heather Richardson HMI
Date of inspection:	September 2002

Introduction

1. This inspection of Derby City local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working and participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in February 2001). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 108 schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 83 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to three primary schools and one secondary school. Those visits tested the views of governors and headteachers on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, and is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money.

Commentary

4. Derby City has many characteristics that reflect the national average overall, but which mask significant differences across the city. Some wards are very prosperous, while the unemployment rate in other wards is over 13 per cent. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is similar to that found nationally, but these families mainly live in the inner city and this is reflected in schools' rolls. The percentage of Indian and Pakistani heritage pupils is higher than the national average. The overall standard of attainment of Derby City pupils is broadly in line with the national average at Key Stage 1, but is generally below the national average at Key Stages 2 to 4. The rate of improvement in different subjects and key stages varies, but most rates are at least in line with the national trends.

5. There have been significant changes in both the council and the education service of Derby City since the last inspection in 2000, some relatively recent. The political control of the council has remained the same, but there has been a marked change of elected members and responsibilities held, including those members most closely linked with education. The education service has been restructured to increase capacity, using consultancy advice following the last inspection. However, owing to recruitment difficulties for assistant director posts, the education management team has only been at full strength since February 2002.

6. Derby's 2000 inspection followed a very difficult time for the LEA and a new director of education had only recently taken up post. The inspection highlighted corporate weaknesses, including planning and decision making, and weaknesses in several key aspects of the LEA's support for its schools, notably its role in relation to monitoring, challenge, intervention and support. The inspection noted some strengths and the capacity for improvement, but the LEA was poor overall and an early re-inspection was recommended to appraise progress.

7. The LEA now has a clearer strategy for supporting school improvement, which is set in the context of a more coherent corporate planning framework. The LEA has improved since the last inspection and now performs nearly all of its functions at least satisfactorily. It has made some improvement in almost every aspect criticised in the last inspection and those aspects that were good at the last inspection have continued to be good. Two aspects have deteriorated; the LEA's support for schools causing concern and its support for information and communication technology (ICT) in school administration. However, the LEA is clearly committed to further improvement.

Strengths

There are particular strengths in:

- the approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools;
- support to schools focused on areas of greatest need;
- support for standards in literacy;
- support for standards in numeracy*;
- support for minority ethnic and Traveller children*;
- support for school leadership and management*;

- support for financial services*
- assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
- the standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement*;
- meeting its statutory obligations in respect of special educational needs; and
- support for health and safety, welfare and child protection.

Those marked * were judged a strength at the previous inspection and have not been re-inspected.

Weaknesses

The following weaknesses remain:

- the identification of and intervention in under-performing schools;
- support for standards in and the curriculum use of ICT;
- support for gifted and talented pupils; and
- services for ICT in school administration.

8. The LEA has improved because senior officers, notably the director of education, and elected members have shown determination in tackling the weaknesses. There was much to do and, in order to ensure the essential building blocks were in place, the LEA sacrificed some collaborative development in the interest of expediency. Officers and elected members recognise this and the LEA is now working hard to ensure, for example, that its vision is shared, and that schools fully understand its priorities. The strengthening of the education management team, whose impact has already been noted by schools and partners, has given the LEA the capacity to increase its rate of improvement as well as providing some confidence for the future.

9. Although the LEA now has satisfactory systems and structures in place, and has recruited good senior staff, much is yet to be put to the test, to be proven credible in practice. However, it is performing satisfactorily. Plans have been produced, but they are not consistently informed or assessed by measurable outcomes. Much is in the remit of the LEA, not least as it develops consistency between its services, but some responsibility also lies with schools. The previous inspection report commented on the need for schools to put the past behind them. Relationships have improved, but a small number of schools still appear reluctant to co-operate fully with the LEA.

Section 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement

Context

10. Derby's socio-economic indicators have changed little since the last inspection and thus remain broadly in line with the national average. However, there are significant variations between wards including, for example, unemployment rates, which range from below two per cent to 13.9 per cent.

11. There are about 21,000 pupils of statutory school age in the primary schools, 15,000 in secondary schools and about 350 in special schools. The number of pupils in primary schools is projected to decline to about 20,000 by 2006. The number of pupils in secondary schools is set to rise slightly up to 2005 and then to fall.

12. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils across the city remains broadly in line with the national average, but there is a significant variation between the wards from, for example, about two per cent to 75 per cent. This variation is reflected in schools. The percentage from each minority ethnic group is in line with the national average apart from pupils of Indian and Pakistani heritage, which are above average. There are approximately 1,800 refugees and asylum seekers in Derby, of whom 200 are of school age.

13. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is in line with the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN).

14. There is educational provision for all three and four year-olds; about 90 per cent of four year-olds are in schools. There are at least part-time places available for all three and four year-olds whose parents want one.

15. Derby maintains eight nursery, 25 infant, 20 junior, 36 primary, 13 secondary and five special schools. It has one multi-centre pupil referral unit (PRU). Thirty-eight of the infant or primary schools have attached nursery classes and eight of the secondary schools provide post-16 education. Derby has 86 community schools, nine foundation schools, 12 voluntary aided and one voluntary controlled school. Since the time of the last inspection, one primary school has been opened and a secondary school has closed.

16. Six schools have Beacon status. There are three specialist schools, for sports, technology and the arts. The LEA has secured initial approval for a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme. The provisional plan is that three new schools will replace five current primary phase schools and the buildings of two secondary schools will be replaced. Two Sure Start projects have been established, and two more are in the development stage.

Performance

17. Ofsted inspection evidence indicates that, overall, pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is below the national average.

18. The performance of pupils in Derby City is broadly in line with the national average at Key Stage 1, but is generally below the national average at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. This is

similar to the last inspection. The rate of improvement in different subjects and key stages varies. Most rates are at least in line with the national trends, but, in terms of statistical neighbours, half are below the average of similar authorities¹.

19. The percentage of Key Stage 1 pupils gaining Level 2 and above in reading, writing and mathematics was broadly in line with that achieved nationally in 2001, and in writing it was above that of similar LEAs. Attainment at Level 3 is above that found nationally in mathematics and is well above the national trend in writing.

20. At the end of Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 and above in English, mathematics and science is below that achieved nationally, but in line with similar LEAs. The rate of improvement in mathematics and science is in line with that achieved nationally and above that in similar LEAs. However, the rate of improvement in English is below the national rate and well below that of similar LEAs. Attainment at Level 5 and above is broadly in line in mathematics and science, but is below average in English. Provisional results for 2002 indicate that standards have risen slightly in mathematics and fallen slightly in English.

21. The percentage of Key Stage 3 pupils gaining Level 5 and above in English, mathematics and science is below the average nationally, but in line with that in similar LEAs. However, provisional results for 2002 bring Derby's English results close to the national average, with results in mathematics and science broadly the same as 2001.

22. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) rose in 2001 and provisional results for 2002 indicate a further slight increase. These results are in line with the national average and those in similar LEAs. The percentage of pupils with one or more GCSE A*-G grades was below the national average, but in line with similar LEAs, as was the average points score. Rates of improvement vary. That of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE is in line with the national rate and that of similar LEAs, but other GCSE rates are below those of similar LEAs and the average points score rate of improvement is well below the national average.

23. In most subjects and key stages, there is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls in Derby and that found both nationally and in similar LEAs. The relative performance of boys and girls within the LEA varies across key stages and subjects. The performance of pupils of minority ethnic heritage varies. For example, at Key Stage 2, pupils from Pakistani heritage performed less well than other pupils whereas Black and Indian heritage pupils had above average results. However, school level data suggest a more complex pattern of attainment.

24. Ofsted inspection reports show that the proportion of schools, which are good or very good, is broadly in line with that in similar LEAs, but below that found nationally. At the beginning of the inspection there were three schools in special measures, two schools

¹ Derby's statistical neighbours are Bolton, Bristol, Kirklees, Southampton, Rochdale, Oldham, Tameside, Walsall, Coventry and Stockton-on-Tees.

with serious weaknesses and three under-achieving schools, one of which also had an inadequate sixth form.

25. In 2000-01, the proportion of pupils permanently excluded from school was above the national average for primary schools and in line with that for secondary schools in comparison with the national and similar LEA equivalents.

26. Attendance in both primary and secondary schools last year was broadly in line when compared nationally and with similar LEAs. Levels of unauthorised absence are above average for primary schools and broadly in line for secondary schools

Funding

27. Education in Derby is now funded at the average of both its statistical neighbours and all unitary authorities. Derby has increased its education spending in recent years and spent just above its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for the first time in 2001-02. This year it plans to spend £108.3 million, just above the SSA total of £107.7 million. The percentage of the local schools budget (LSB) delegated in the individual schools budget (ISB) met the government's target in both 2001-02 and 2002-03. Derby's 2001-02 Standards Fund Grant fell between the averages of its statistical neighbours and all unitary authorities, but was devolved at an above average level.

28. Derby's planned total expenditure per pupil in the local schools budget for 2001-02 was just above that of its statistical neighbours while both were below the national averages. However, there were different patterns between the local schools budget and individual schools budget in the three phases. The primary local schools budget was marginally above comparable LEAs (Derby £2,617; statistical neighbours £2,602; Unitary LEAs £2,594) while the primary individual schools budget, which in Derby did not then include SEN budgets which have been delegated in 2002-03, was below (£1,809: £1,913: £1,951). The secondary local schools budget was above comparators (£3,284: £3,247: £3,305), as was the secondary individual schools budget (£2,664: £2,594: £2,641). The special school² local schools budget (£17,584: £18,274: £18,713) and individual schools budget (£9,709: £10,520: £9,977) were both below comparators.

29. In Derby, age weighted pupil units (the fixed pupil factor in delegated budgets) are below those of comparable LEAs, indicating that it makes greater use of formula factors for distributing the ISB.

30. The LEA is successful in securing external funding and the education service is benefiting from sources as varied as the Single Regeneration Budget, European Social Fund, New Opportunities Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Education Action Zone (EAZ) and Excellence Cluster. The Capital Grant has increased threefold in recent years (to £15 million in 2002-30) and a Private Finance Initiative has secured initial approval.

² Special schools comparisons include the School Standards Grant component.

Council structure

31. The council has reviewed and modified its structure since the last inspection, thereby completing its modernisation processes. A new constitution was approved in October 2001 and implemented in December 2001.

32. The council now has 51 members representing 17 restructured wards. In the full council elections in May 2002, Labour retained overall control with 27 seats, 12 members are Liberal Democrat, 11 members are Conservative and there is one independent member. The cabinet is the executive body and consists of the leader and nine other members with portfolio responsibilities. One member has responsibility for lifelong learning, but the executive operates on the basis of collective decision making. The lifelong learning and culture overview and scrutiny commission is designed to review decisions taken by the executive, scrutinise performance and make recommendations to the executive and the full council. The commission is made up of eight elected members, two parent-governor co-opted members, two diocesan co-opted members and one co-opted member representing other faiths. Trades union representatives attend as observers.

33. The officer structure consists of a chief executive and seven directors of service, one of whom is also the deputy chief executive and another is the director of education. There has been a major restructuring of the senior management of the education department since the last inspection. This has changed the roles and membership of the senior management team, and reshaped and refocused the groupings of services and management responsibilities. Owing to difficulties in recruitment, the complete senior management team has only been in post since February 2002 and the recruitment of all second and third tier officers has only recently been completed.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

34. At the last inspection, the LEA's Educational Development Plan (EDP) was judged adequate, but with a number of weaknesses, including a lack of clarity about the link between activities and outcomes and the lack of precise success criteria. Since then the LEA has made satisfactory progress in implementing at least some aspects of the first EDP, notably in response to national strategies, although its overall support for schools causing concern was inadequate. The variable quality of indicators set and measures used made impact difficult to assess and, consequently, there is a weakness in the LEA's own evaluation.

35. Nevertheless, the LEA met its target for pupils with five or more GCSE A* - C grades in 2001. The ambitious Key Stage 2 targets were not met, but the percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 and above increased in both English and mathematics. The target for unauthorised absence in primary schools was met. Unauthorised absence in secondary schools was similar to that found nationally, and the LEA did not meet its target. Authorised absence in both primary and secondary schools was broadly in line with the national averages. In terms of exclusions, the LEA came very close to achieving its target for reducing permanent exclusions.

36. Although the LEA's second EDP for 2002-07 (EDP2) was approved by the Secretary of State, the LEA has since revised it to address some of the criticisms made at the

time of approval. This plan is now satisfactory. The EDP is coherent with the new corporate plan and is aligned with other plans, for example, the Education Action Zone plan. Overall, the LEA is getting better at strategic planning.

37. The LEA has identified appropriate national and local priorities in EDP2. These are:

- excellence in early years and primary education;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4;
- introducing innovation to support teaching and learning;
- promoting effective schools;
- the use of ICT in raising attainment; and
- recruitment and retention strategy.

38. The targets in the plan are challenging and require a rapid rate of improvement. The 2004 attainment targets represent a significant increase on the 2003 schools' aggregated targets, but they are more closely aligned with the schools' targets than were those in its first EDP, thus demonstrating a more effective target setting process.

39. The revised EDP2 has a sharper focus on the intended outcomes of activities, many of which are now measurable. The audit of the 1999-2002 EDP was improved to include some measured outcomes, and appropriate conclusions were drawn. However, the audit is not consistently rigorous and the link between audit and activity is still not always clear, despite some rationalisation of the activities. Nor is it clear how some of the targets will be met. For example, there is nothing in the plan to show how attainment will be raised in ICT at Key Stage 3. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating EDP2 have been appropriately strengthened. Early monitoring of this plan was inhibited by a lack of rigorous use of data to support the analysis of progress and impact. As yet, the LEA does not consistently use data to inform the planning cycle at all levels. This is subject to a recommendation in the corporate issues section of the report.

40. The consultation with schools on EDP2 clearly indicates their contribution to the priorities in the plan, as in the priority for the recruitment and retention of teachers. However, the school survey indicates a significant difference between primary and secondary schools' assessment of the quality of the LEA's strategic planning for school improvement. While primary schools rate this as significantly better than at the time of the last inspection, secondary schools view it as worse. For some schools, this is coupled with a questioning of the LEA's ability to provide appropriate and timely support. Inspection evidence indicates a difference between schools' perceptions of particular strategies, such as the LEA's support for literacy and numeracy, which is highly regarded by schools, and the LEA's overall strategy, which many schools have difficulty in articulating. Two factors contribute to this situation. One is acknowledged by the LEA and its schools: that the LEA's vision is still not clearly communicated and understood, despite its high profile in corporate and education service documents. The second is a continuing legacy of the past, that a few schools remain at best ambivalent, and at worst apparently hostile, to sharing a common agenda with the LEA.

Recommendation**In order to clarify the strategy for school improvement:**

- work with schools to produce a straightforward strategic statement of a shared vision for school improvement.

41. Derby's strategy for school improvement is now set within a firmer corporate planning context than at the time of the previous inspection. Its spending is in line with similar LEAs and unitary authorities. The LEA has made a strategic link between school improvement and inclusion, articulated in one of the posts of assistant director of education to emerge from the restructuring of the education service. This is a significant development in the LEA's approach to school improvement and the message that 'a good school is an inclusive school' is beginning to resonate with headteachers. The primary purpose of school improvement is being echoed by officers from a range of services within the LEA, such as property services. Such understanding is not universal, but it gives substance to the LEA's attempts to bring greater coherence to its school improvement strategy.

42. The LEA and the Education Action Zone are beginning to share thinking on how to draw together all the current strands of school improvement work more effectively, as well as plan for future developments. For a relatively small LEA, there are complex relationships to manage within school improvement, given some schools are in the Education Action Zone, others in the Excellence Cluster and some schools are in neither group. In addition, from April 2002, 20 schools have been targeted as part of Derby City's local public service agreement to raise standards at Key Stage 2 and GCSE. These strands of activity all have implications for the deployment of the LEA's resources. Given this complexity, the strategic collaboration between the LEA and the Education Action Zone has the potential for increased coherence and efficiency.

The allocation of resources to priorities

43. The 2000 inspection noted that the council's spending did not match its stated high priority on education and that it had failed to convince schools of its commitment to improve funding. The lack of strategic direction and transparency about funding, together with no senior officer with the resource policy brief, all contributed to an unsatisfactory position.

44. The council has carried out the recommendations on funding and resources made in the last report. The allocation of resources to priorities is now satisfactory with emerging strengths and with good capacity for continued improvement.

45. Funding increases have been passed on to schools and the LEA has met the Government's targets on levels of delegation. Its initial planning documents for 2003-04 confirm its intention to repeat these commitments. The council is also purposeful in aligning other funding streams, such as Neighbourhood Renewal Funds, Sure Start and Lottery Grants, in support of its education objectives.

46. Changes in the current funding formula for schools followed a sound consultation in the autumn of 2001 and spring of 2002. Despite this, more than a half of the schools surveyed

still consider the formula lacks clarity. There are markedly different views between groups of schools in the city, who are looking for incompatible results from the budget consultation. Some schools are still contesting the rationale for the budget strategy, the relatively high costs of under fives provision, and the use of the additional educational needs element of the funding formula. Officers and members are aware that there are historic and current issues around the funding formula that need full and collaborative consideration and, rightly, have begun to address this. They are acting appropriately within a difficult context. Although it targets resources on priorities, the council does not yet have a systematic evaluation of its education spending to share with schools, increase the transparency of funding and inform future decisions.

Recommendation

In order to improve the funding mechanism for schools and promote consensus:

- assess the impact of current funding arrangements for under fives provision and the additional educational needs elements in the school funding formula and, in consultation with schools across the phases, revise those arrangements.

47. Budget management within the education service is generally good with regular reports to elected members and senior officers showing that expenditure is monitored and, with few exceptions, contained within budget. However, there has been a general overspend on transport in the past and there continues to be an annual overspend on SEN transport which merits more rigorous control. In 2001-02 the LEA retained a relatively high central SEN budget, much of which has been delegated in 2002-03. Its comparatively high retained strategic management costs are currently inflated by a contingency element associated with a secondary school closure. This element will not be included in the 2003-04 budget.

48. While the council has been increasing the overall education budget and percentages delegated, school budget balances have quickly doubled from £2.6 million at the end of 1999-00 to £5.2 million at the end of 2001-02. The majority of primary schools had a surplus of more than five per cent of budget at the end of 2001-02 and 27 had a surplus of over ten per cent; two secondary schools had over five per cent. The very few schools with deficits have been required to produce a recovery plan. Officers have reported on the schools' surpluses to elected members and properly advised them that there may be prudent aspects in the schools' approaches. In future, school improvement officers will be briefed on school budgets in preparation for the annual review meeting with individual headteachers and will, rightly, challenge the rationale behind the larger surpluses.

Recommendations**In order to improve the capacity of schools to budget effectively in support of school improvement activity:**

- provide appropriate challenge to primary schools with surpluses in excess of ten per cent and secondary schools in excess of five per cent; and
- assess, in consultation with schools, the effect of the funding formula on school budget surpluses.

Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value

49. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's approach to continuous service improvement and Best Value was poor. In particular, the timetable for Best Value reviews had slipped and performance management was inconsistently applied. Progress on the recommendations made since then has been satisfactory, mainly as a result of action taken in the past nine months. The LEA has good capacity for further improvement from the present satisfactory position.

50. Until recently the council's approach to Best Value had been reasonably well set out in the relevant documents, but very varied in its application and consequently uneven in its impact. For example, in 2001 an external Best Value inspection was critical of the review of the education service's ICT development, although positive about that of its service for training and development.

51. During the past year members and officers have set about improving the situation. The 2002-03 Best Value Performance Plan, accepted without qualification by the external auditor, gives an unequivocal and high priority to the council's work with schools and young people. There is now a clear approach to performance management based on a pyramid of individual plans, service improvement plans and the Best Value Performance Plan. Service improvement plans, albeit acknowledged by senior officers as being of varied quality, are in place across all education services. A too common feature of these and other plans, however, is the lack of specific and measurable targets and time scales. The education management team is reviewing the service plans in a methodical sequence and each completed review has produced clear, minuted points of actions for further development.

52. Individual plans and individual performance management, locally called the achievement and development scheme, have been introduced across the council and given high priority by the education management team. This appropriate emphasis was also noted in a recent Investors in People report. However, the education management team accepts that there are some inconsistencies in the application of the scheme.

53. The LEA now engages headteachers and governors directly in the evaluation of its functions and services, in part through the liaison groups, one for headteachers and another for governors, which take an overview across services. Further evaluation takes place in the service improvement groups associated with each service area and which include school representatives. There is also an annual survey of user satisfaction conducted in two parts,

one for core and one for sold services. However, no training is currently offered to headteachers and governors in the application of Best Value principles.

Recommendation

In order to improve the contribution schools make to service development and to enhance their capacity to act as informed purchasers of services:

- provide training for headteachers, governors and bursars in the application of Best Value principles.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary

54. The LEA carries out the majority of its school improvement functions competently and some are performed well. It now has a much clearer focus on school improvement, reflected in its strategy and in the restructuring of the education service. The link between school improvement and social inclusion is a consistent thread through corporate and education service planning and is contributing significantly to the LEA's work with schools. However, at this stage, much of the work has not been fully tested. This is true, for example, of the LEA's monitoring and challenging of schools, where there has been significant progress in setting up transparent and rigorous procedures with schools to address previous weaknesses. The LEA has, rightly, established a small team of school improvement officers with a very clear brief, thereby targeting its limited resources at this priority. However, the LEA is still coping with the legacy of past weakness and the loss of schools' confidence in its ability to provide appropriate support and challenge. As its new systems become embedded, they will be tested by the LEA's capacity to deliver and by schools' objectivity as users of the services.

55. For the most part, the LEA's support for school improvement is based on sound principles and operated by effective professionals. Its weaknesses lie in planning frameworks that are insufficiently systematic and rigorous to monitor progress, and in inconsistency in the quality of its services, which is beginning to be addressed through improved performance management. Where its services are good, as in support for literacy, numeracy, and for some vulnerable groups, this is having an impact on pupils' attainment. However, rates of improvement are variable. Most are at least in line with the national trends, but several are below those of similar LEAs. Costs are similar to other authorities and, overall, the LEA gives satisfactory value for money.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

56. The last inspection judged that, although the LEA's definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention was clear, schools' understanding of the LEA's role was extremely variable. There was a good deal of ambiguity and misunderstanding. Since then, the LEA has been at pains to develop an improved system and to consult and inform schools thoroughly. It now has a good system that every school should understand well. This represents a good rate of progress by the LEA.

57. The new system represents a refinement of the authority's previous approach, and takes account of good practice nationally. Schools are placed in one of six categories according to their quality, as determined by the use of clear criteria, and they receive programmes of monitoring and support to an extent that is dependent on their needs. The criteria on which the system is based align well with Ofsted criteria for evaluating schools and use performance data well. In addition, the LEA sensibly identifies a number of schools requiring transitional support because of particular circumstances, such as a change of headteacher. The system, very sensibly, covers SEN enhanced resource provision and the pupil referral unit, as well as all mainstream and special schools.

58. The system has two distinct strands. The school improvement officers make a desktop analysis of their schools, collating evidence provided by a range of LEA services. Meanwhile, the schools are expected to undertake a self-evaluation along lines suggested by the LEA. These two strands combine when the school improvement officer and the school discuss the evidence, and, in theory, agree the school's categorisation. The school improvement officer records these discussions and, together with the headteacher or chair of governors, presents the findings annually to the governing body.

59. The authority has worked very hard to prepare this system, which accords well with the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. A working group of headteachers was involved in devising the scheme, there has been extensive consultation with schools, and the new machinery was piloted last year before full-scale introduction this year. The LEA is now moving sensibly to develop, with schools, a specification that will demonstrate the evidence required for making the judgements on which the system rests.

60. The school survey undertaken for this inspection shows that schools generally regard the new system as satisfactory, though secondary schools are less convinced than primaries. Focus group discussion held during the inspection showed that headteachers, with the exception of a few who were not yet fully prepared to give credence to the LEA's school improvement role, understood the system well. Not all governors, however, had as good an understanding, despite the explanations given by the LEA newsletters to governors.

61. The new system has many virtues, as already noted. It may, however, prove to have a weakness implicit in the well-intentioned emphasis on linking LEA monitoring to school self-evaluation. The LEA's documentation makes it very clear that, rightly, the school improvement officers will hold to their own judgements, even if a school cannot agree. Nevertheless, some schools are not entirely clear that the system is more than supported self-evaluation, and indeed, in a few cases, are not convinced that the LEA has the capacity to make robust judgements that may conflict with a school's self-evaluation.

Recommendation

In order to ensure that the system of monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools is operating validly and robustly:

- use Best Value principles to review the system after two years, with an interim report after one year, and with particular focus on the extent to which the LEA makes independent judgements derived from evidence.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

62. This aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, though the overall strategic planning of school improvement work was unsatisfactory. Both the detailed and the broader aspects have now improved: the former is now good, and the latter is satisfactory. This represents a rate of progress that is at least satisfactory.

63. The team of school improvement officers, which plays the key role in the interaction between LEA and schools, is well deployed. School improvement officers' time is allocated according to the categorisation of their schools, with a little time preserved for their work on

EDP activities. At present, the team is under-strength because of recruitment difficulties, but the general pattern of work is linked well to individual schools' needs. In addition, the system rightly assumes that other services will contribute in proportion to schools' needs, and notional amounts of time are indicated in the planning document.

64. The LEA recognises that it cannot meet all schools' wishes in providing support, and it therefore operates a leaner curriculum service than it used to. It is therefore able to direct its core resourcing to support schools in proportion to their need identified according to public criteria. A few schools have been slow to recognise the changed role of the LEA and lament the lack of a range of advisory posts. However, the authority provides a traded service for training and professional development, found in a Best Value inspection last year to be a good service. It also usefully provides a brokerage function for schools, identifying external providers, which is quality assured by the LEA.

65. The lists of schools provided by the LEA for this inspection included some confusion about the authority's categorisation of a few schools, or of their categorisation by Ofsted. This may be a teething problem experienced in establishing the new regime, but it points to the need for accurate recording and planning.

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

66. The last inspection found that the LEA's monitoring of schools was generally effective, but schools tended to view the authority's challenge to them as confined to the process of target setting. The LEA has now broadened its approach and is currently making its monitoring procedures more effective. Its collection, analysis and support for the use of performance data was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection, but these have also improved and are now satisfactory. Overall, this represents a satisfactory rate of improvement and the LEA now has the capacity to improve further.

67. The school improvement team, the literacy and numeracy teams, and the information management team share intelligence about schools' performance. Links with the Education Action Zone have also occasioned some beneficial joint targeting. There is also now the school improvement team's desktop analyses of each school's performance, including academic standards, financial health, and inclusion rates. The efficacy of this collation will be dependent on a new software package, currently awaited. However, promising work has already been undertaken, such as the provision to schools of benchmarked financial data. The new package is intended to enable the school improvement officers to make a comprehensive summary of each school's standing. This, together with the school's self-evaluation, will underpin the differentiated system of support or intervention.

Recommendation

In order to ensure maximum transparency and to assist school self-evaluation:

- provide each school with the data product deriving from the LEA's desk-top analysis in time for the autumn term discussions with the school improvement officer.

68. The school survey indicates that primary schools generally feel that the LEA knows them reasonably or very well, a significant improvement since the last inspection. However, the secondary schools' response is widely divergent, and several secondary schools believe the LEA's knowledge of them to be poor or very poor, an unchanged picture since the last inspection. The LEA recognises that it has yet to demonstrate to the more sceptical secondary schools that its school improvement officers will provide them with beneficial challenge, but in instituting its new system, described above, it has taken the essential first steps. Its own survey of schools in all phases shows that, for the most part, they are strongly appreciative of the work of school improvement officers, but additional evidence gained in this inspection showed that some secondary schools continue to believe their own resources are superior to the LEA's. The authority is likely only to convince these schools of the value it gives if it can provide a good desktop analysis and consistent, expert challenge.

69. Focus group discussions and other evidence during this inspection showed that nursery, primary and special schools experience satisfactory challenge from the LEA across a range of their functions, as do at least some secondary schools. In several cases the school improvement officer has challenged schools on social inclusion or the performance of particular groups of pupils. Special schools, especially, have experienced expert monitoring by the LEA that has given attention to their potential for improvement, for example, in being encouraged to develop their use of SEN assessment systems

70. School improvement officers record all their contacts with schools on a standard proforma, but the depth of analysis varies too much in the examples seen. Other services have their own methods of recording, and there is no common way for recording crucial evaluative information. The summary record provided to schools after the annual school improvement officer visits sometimes lacks substantive detail to support some judgements.

71. The LEA's provision of data about pupils' performance has improved recently, following consultation with schools and the support of a seconded headteacher. Schools receive the LEA's data before that which comes from national sources and its detail allows useful local comparisons. Pupil-level data is now included, which takes account of pupil turnover and transfer since previous results were obtained.

72. The LEA has not regularly provided a detailed analysis of ethnic groups' progress, school by school, because it has not received identification from all schools of pupils' ethnic identity. However, it undertook a special collection of ethnic data last year and has begun to examine patterns of achievement, though the schools have not yet received detailed analyses. From this year the annual package provided for schools will include ethnic group analysis.

73. In the past, the authority encouraged schools to use a locally produced software package to track pupils' progress. This appears to have fallen into disuse as schools found it incapable of meeting their requirements. Accordingly, many schools have developed their own systems, particularly the secondary schools. Too little training has been provided for schools since the last inspection in using data and in this respect the post-inspection action plan has not been fulfilled. Schools also express dissatisfaction with the provision of information about pupils as they transfer from primary to secondary school, although this is partly a result of delays with national data this year, and the complexities of admissions arrangements involving a number of different authorities.

Recommendations**In order to equip schools better to analyse and improve their performance:**

- identify schools' needs in data analysis, and secure training provision as required, drawing on the potential of the national pupil database, and the pupil-level analyses currently provided by the LEA; and
- in discussion with schools, establish an improved system for the transfer of pupil-level data when pupils enter secondary school.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

74. The last inspection judged that this aspect of the LEA's work was satisfactory. However, since then, the quality of work has deteriorated, and the LEA's recent performance has been unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, there is every likelihood of early improvement as new systems begin to take effect.

75. Since the last inspection two schools that already had serious weaknesses deteriorated to the extent that they have now been identified by Ofsted as requiring special measures, and another school, despite receiving additional national resourcing because of the challenging circumstances it faces, also now requires special measures. This evidence alone might be enough to indicate the ineffectiveness of the LEA's support. However, it is supplemented by evidence from some school visits made during this inspection. In several schools the LEA did not act effectively enough when management had become problematic. It has also not always been able to maintain, in a timely way, all of its promised commitments to under-performing schools. To some extent, the latter may well have arisen from the uncertainties occasioned by the large-scale re-organisation of the education department last year, but in some cases there had already been reluctance or inability by the LEA to tackle difficult issues in under-performing schools. A few of these schools have suffered from inadequate brokering of support by their school improvement officer over the last two years, and, in certain cases, schools have had to press the authority hard to receive the support they needed.

76. By contrast, there is evidence of some specific action by the LEA that has been very helpful to the schools. The literacy and numeracy teams have been effective in providing intensive support, in one case the assiduous work of the school improvement officer has been beneficial to the headteacher, and the training and professional development team has given tailored support helpfully to one school. Furthermore, the overall strategic monitoring of progress undertaken by the head of the monitoring and intervention service has been rigorous and beneficial in some cases.

77. If the LEA implements its new procedures rigorously, the weaknesses are likely to disappear. The new monitoring system has the capacity to identify schools' weaknesses earlier. The systems for allocating support to priority schools are now clear and well focused. The systematic termly review of progress of each of these schools should ensure that any failure by the LEA to support a school's action plan is noted and rectified promptly. The regular case conferences involving senior staff are also likely to identify schools where

progress is insufficiently rapid. The LEA has shown that it is prepared to use its powers of intervention: for instance, it has appointed additional governors to three under-performing schools.

Support for literacy

78. Support for literacy was good overall in the 2000 inspection and very good in primary schools. Support is now very good, with good capacity for continued improvement.

79. Standards in both reading and writing at Key Stage 1 are comparable to the national averages, with a higher proportion of pupils achieving Level 3 in writing. The rate of improvement is above the national rate in both reading and writing. The 2001 Key Stage 2 English test results increased by three per cent to 71 per cent, but this fell short of the LEA's challenging target of 78 per cent. Standards are in line with similar LEAs, but below the national average, as is the rate of improvement. However, the gap between the LEA's results and the national average narrowed in 2001.

80. The school survey rated the LEA's support for literacy as good, a significant improvement from the previous inspection. This view was endorsed by focus groups. The team is very well-led and benefits from consultants who are very highly regarded by schools. Whilst there is a clear strategic lead to literacy, which schools recognise, this high quality is not always reflected in planning documents.

81. The literacy team has continued to target its support to schools effectively, using clear criteria. It recognises the need to keep its support under review and respond to new factors, such as a recent dip in the performance of some 'light touch' schools. Although the LEA has not met its Key Stage 2 targets, the literacy team has been vigilant in supporting schools to raise standards. The focus on curriculum targets, notably writing, has had a measurable effect on standards in intensive support schools. Similarly, a focus on boys' attainment may well have been a key factor in reducing the gender gap in participating schools from double to single figures. Support for nursery schools, which was limited at the time of the previous inspection, has improved and is now satisfactory with emerging strengths.

82. A strength of the LEA's support for literacy is the range of strategies used to promote good practice. The LEA actively promotes the sharing of good practice within the LEA, especially through the use of literacy development teachers, expert headteachers and network schools. Teachers value the opportunity to observe and be observed, particularly as the sessions form part of ongoing training when they can absorb ideas more fully and track the impact in their own classrooms. The good practice focus within the LEA is complemented by effective partnership working on a local and national scale. There are well-established links with the University of Derby, which are integral to ongoing development, as well as high profile conferences with national speakers. Links with support for English as an additional language continue to be good.

Support for numeracy

83. In the 2000 inspection, support for numeracy was a strength. No detailed fieldwork was done in this area in the current inspection. The LEA's own evaluation indicates it is still good and the school survey reveals a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of support received (in the top 25 per cent of LEAs surveyed) and a significant improvement since the last inspection. The latest assessment results show that progress has been in line with the national trend and above that of similar authorities. The inspection team therefore judges that support for numeracy is still very good.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

84. The support for ICT in the curriculum was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's own evaluation is that it continues to be unsatisfactory, and the school survey rates it as poor. A limited inspection was therefore carried out. Inspection evidence confirms that, while there has been some improvement, it is still unsatisfactory overall.

85. The LEA has made significant progress in strengthening the ratio of computers to pupils and has fully met the government's targets. Similarly, the take-up of New Opportunities Fund training has been above average. All schools have registered and there is a high completion rate, reaching 97 per cent of primary schools by the end of 2002. The LEA has also provided intensive support for schools identified through their Ofsted reports as having weaknesses in ICT. This has resulted in some success in raising standards and developing staff expertise.

86. Information and communication technology is appropriately identified as a discrete priority with the LEA's EDP2. However, the activities focus almost exclusively on Key Stages 1 and 2 and are too vague on how standards are to be raised. There is no indication of how the LEA proposes to meet its Key Stage 3 target. Coupled with an ICT development plan, which all involved acknowledge is out of date, the conclusion that the LEA lacks a clear strategy to support schools in ICT is unavoidable.

Recommendation**In order to improve the LEA's support for curriculum ICT:**

- develop a clear strategy which:
 - is based on an audit of standards and practice in schools; and
 - is supported by a development plan with specific and measurable outcomes to defined timescales and with clear responsibilities.

87. The LEA's ability to improve its support for ICT has been thwarted by inadequate staffing. Recent appointments have improved the situation in terms of both curriculum and technical support, but the temporary nature of the adviser's post and its specific primary focus means that staffing is still inadequate overall. This is not to diminish the commitment of current officers to making a real difference to ICT in Derby. The LEA has supported ICT in secondary schools through its brokered arrangements, but this is not fully meeting schools'

needs. The relationship with the LEA's Key Stage 3 Strategy ICT consultant has yet to be determined, as has the potential of disseminating good practice in schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the LEA's support for curriculum ICT:

- in consultation with schools, review the staffing of ICT support to ensure there is sufficient high quality staffing to target schools' needs.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

88. This aspect was not inspected in the last inspection as the national Key Stage 3 strategy was only then beginning. Nevertheless, promising work already underway in literacy and numeracy was noted. Since then, the authority has made a satisfactory start in establishing a sound basis for the strategy.

89. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has been consistently below the national figures in all core subjects, but the LEA is aiming to meet the national targets by 2007. This therefore provides a major challenge for the LEA and the schools. In recent years results in mathematics and science have improved at the national rate, but English has generally lagged behind. Overall, therefore, an increased rate of improvement will be required, especially in English, if the LEA's targets are to be met.

90. The LEA made an early start on introducing the literacy and numeracy strands of the national Key Stage 3 strategy, and work in these aspects has emphasised sensibly the links with existing programmes in the primary phase. Summer schools have been established in almost all secondary schools. Literacy and numeracy consultants have been in place for 18 months, and the teams have now audited provision in all schools and provide differentiated levels of support to meet perceived needs. Their work is well conceived and organised, and schools responded well to early training activities. Liaison with schools has been well articulated.

91. The other aspects of the strategy were established more recently: consultants for science, ICT and the foundation subjects began work over the last six months, and the strategy manager has just started. Management of the strategy is linked well with the work of the school improvement team, and it is intended that the implementation of the work will be closely related to the LEA's overall work on support and intervention. At present, the indications are that this complex task is proceeding satisfactorily. Support programmes for schools requiring special measures call on the Key Stage 3 strategy team, but its management is well aware of the need to ensure that there is no duplication or over-supply of support to schools with problems. Every secondary school now has a Key Stage 3 manager, and the strategy team is drawing up a contract with each school, specifying the nature of the support to be provided. Medium term planning is sound, but monitoring and evaluation procedures are not yet sufficiently tight, and the team has not yet developed the detailed analysis it will eventually need about particular schools' strengths and weaknesses across the curriculum. The future relationship between the strategy and the existing subject networks has also not yet been explored.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

92. This work was good at the time of the last inspection. No detailed fieldwork was done in this area in the current inspection. However, the school survey shows that schools judge the provision as good, and the LEA's self-evaluation demonstrates that further improvement has been made. The authority has made satisfactory progress on the recommendations in the last report about identifying Traveller children and setting targets for their attainment.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

93. The last inspection noted some early developments in provision for gifted and talented pupils, but did not inspect this aspect of work fully. Since then, the LEA has taken some further action, but provision is not yet satisfactory. Progress has been limited and the authority's capacity to make more rapid improvements with its current level of resourcing is doubtful.

94. Pupils attain the higher levels of the National Curriculum better than the national average in some aspects of work in Key Stage 1, but this is not maintained in the later key stages. Recent evidence from Ofsted inspections shows that primary schools generally have a balance of strengths and weaknesses in provision for gifted and talented pupils, but provision was poor in the few secondary schools inspected recently.

95. The LEA has allocated a very small amount of school improvement officer time to supporting gifted and talented provision. This has enabled certain exploratory tasks to be undertaken. Most significantly, it is supporting the development of resources for very able pupils in literacy and numeracy, and this has brought together groups of practitioners. The authority is also developing course provision in thinking skills, which may bring particular benefit to able pupils. The LEA has run summer schools for gifted and talented pupils in conjunction with the Education Action Zone and the University of Derby for three years. A range of opportunities exists within the city for young people with particular talents in sport, music or art, often supported by the LEA. This includes the use of artists in residence and financial provision for sports organisations or young sportspeople.

96. Despite these promising beginnings, the LEA has so far failed to establish a strategy for supporting schools and pupils. It has not yet begun to construct the action plan envisaged in the EDP, and has no clear plan for how to relate its own work in this field with that of the Excellence Cluster, whose schools will be receiving relatively intensive support from their specialist co-ordinator. The LEA is not yet in a position to target schools with weakness in their provision effectively, and has not developed a system for identifying and tracking the progress of gifted and talented pupils across the city. Although the authority has had a general policy paper for some time, there is little indication that it has yet had significant effect. While the summer schools were appreciated by most of the pupils who attended, the authority did not give enough advice to schools about nomination of appropriate pupils, and there was no systematic follow-up for the Year 6 pupils involved to ensure progression when they then transferred to secondary schools.

Recommendations**In order to improve the standards achieved by gifted and talented pupils:**

- identify clearly the respective roles of the LEA and the Excellence Cluster; and
- establish a clear, resourced strategy for identifying and meeting schools' and pupils' needs.

Support for school management

97. This work was good at the time of the last inspection. No detailed fieldwork was done in this area in the current inspection. Recent Ofsted inspections show that the standard of management in schools is broadly in line with all schools nationally and other evidence gathered in this inspection shows that the LEA has improved its support for school self-evaluation.

Support to governors

98. The last inspection found the LEA's support for school governing bodies to be unsatisfactory. Governors' training and general information provision were at least satisfactory, but there were weaknesses in the strategic support given to the governors and in arrangements for consultation. These weaknesses have now been remedied and provision is now satisfactory with some strengths. Good progress has been made and the prospects for further improvement are secure.

99. The LEA has established a new consultation procedure, currently being introduced. It enables representatives of each governing body to meet a senior officer termly, and a representative group to meet the education management team and senior elected members regularly. There is an annual conference for governors. In addition, it is intended that a termly open forum will give governors an opportunity to explore issues in some depth. Although these arrangements are too new to evaluate, they have the potential to promote governors' involvement in policy development.

100. The authority has also improved its provision of information. Governors interviewed are generally positive about the readiness of LEA officers to attend governing body meetings to answer particular queries regarding key matters. The governors' newsletter is frequent, lucid and covers a good range of topics on which governors are likely to need information. It is available electronically or in hard copy. Even though information about the new system of school monitoring has been presented in the newsletters, some governors in focus groups were less than clear about some aspects.

101. The LEA has made significant progress in reducing the number of vacancies among LEA-appointed governors: this figure has reduced from 90 to 54 in less than two years. This is the result of a decision by elected members to broaden the range of LEA-appointees. Previously, nominations by the political parties were required, but now a wider range of

volunteers can apply to an appointment panel. The national governor recruitment strategy and the involvement of a major local employer have also been effective.

102. The LEA increasingly sees the school improvement officers as having a role in governor development. They will present a summary of the LEA's judgements about the school to the governing body annually, and are expected to monitor evidence about the quality of governance and incorporate this in the regular analysis of school performance. This is a useful development of the LEAs' monitoring role. School improvement officers are required, rightly, to provide their termly summary to the chair of the governing body, but it was evident from focus group discussions that this had not always penetrated to every governor, thus implying a need for further development training for chairs.

103. The LEA offers a range of traded services to governors. These include training courses, briefing papers, a conference, a helpline, and consultancy support. Particular attention is given to supporting clerks to governing bodies. The authority's customer survey shows that the provision is generally well received. The training courses focus on relevant, topical issues. The LEA has sensible plans to develop this aspect of work.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

104. In the 2000 inspection, most services to support school management in Derby were satisfactory, although service level agreements reached schools late and more flexible packaging of services was needed. With the exception of ICT, these services continue to be broadly satisfactory.

105. Some aspects of the LEA's approach have improved, for example, the service booklet, which includes outlines of the specifications and standards for both sold and core services, is well set out. Complaints procedures are clear and more flexible packages, including 'pay as you go' services, have been created. The officers' priority is to combine good consultation with purposeful internal management and so ensure that high quality council services reflect schools' needs. The changes made demonstrate that they are beginning to be successful.

106. However, the LEA has not satisfactorily met the recommendation in the last report, to provide more information to schools on alternative providers. Nor has it supported schools to become more efficient purchasers of services by, for example, the provision of training on the application of Best Value principles or the provision of a full brokerage service. Senior officers' argument, that the market for management services in Derby is immature, is an inadequate excuse for the limited progress made, nor is it resolved by their view that schools can and do purchase services from elsewhere. Many schools remain unconvinced and suspect that the council is reluctant to expose its services to competition. Until the council is more transparent in its commitment to Best Value principles, in particular, challenge and competition, some schools will continue to have understandable doubts about its real intentions.

Recommendations

In order to improve relations with schools and to implement Best Value

practice across the education service:

- implement the recommendation in the previous report, to provide more information to schools on alternative providers; and
- assess, in consultation with schools, the potential for the provision of a brokerage service in Derby.

107. At the last inspection **financial services** were good and **human resources** were satisfactory with some strengths. Neither service was the subject of any fieldwork activity this time. Among schools surveyed for this inspection, financial services were described as satisfactory or better by more than 90 per cent of primary schools and as very good by more than a third. The views of the seven secondary schools that responded on this function were mixed. The **payroll service** was rated as significantly improved by primary schools, three quarters of whom described it as satisfactory or better. Secondary schools, which rated this service, held quite polarised views, three rating the service as very good and four as poor. Six of those seven secondary schools rated **personnel services** as good or very good, as did half of the responding primary schools.

108. **Property services** were described previously as less than satisfactory overall. Sound technical aspects were undermined by poor relations with schools which felt ill-informed about priorities and had a low opinion of work carried out.

109. The service is now satisfactory and the capacity for further improvement is good. Both primary and secondary schools reported significant improvement in the performance of property services, but some special schools consider that their needs are still not well understood by the council's service. Building maintenance services were described as satisfactory or better by about two thirds of primary schools and more than half of the secondary schools responding to the school survey. Support for building projects was also described as satisfactory or better by two thirds of primary schools but, in contrast, by less than half of secondary schools.

110. The service has new management arrangements and a more flexible package of services has been offered to schools. Approaches to quality assurance and to consultation with schools are both improving.

Recommendation**In order to improve the property service to special schools:**

- in consultation with special schools, assess the quality of property services they have received from the council or elsewhere in the past two years and take appropriate action.

111. The last inspection described support for **administrative ICT** as satisfactory and improving. However, aspects of the service have deteriorated and, despite recent improvements and the continuing efforts of the officers in this service, it is now poor. A major problem has been the inability of schools to make and maintain electronic connections to the Internet for the distribution of electronic communications. Schools describe the service as having reached a point earlier this year when the system, beset by technical difficulties, could not have been worse. These difficulties were resolved in the late spring and schools confirm that, by and large, the problems of connection have been solved.

112. However, the LEA still faces huge challenges in this area. Its system, predicated on ISDN lines, does not have the capacity to fulfill the growing requirements of schools for curricular and administrative access to electronic data and other information. It does not have an ICT development plan for education that bears any relevance to its present position. It has not developed the habits of using electronic facilities, Internet and intranet sites or electronic exchange of data in order to reduce administrative demands and enhance curriculum development.

113. These difficulties are widely recognised across the education service and readily acknowledged by officers across the council. Those now directly involved have dealt with the most immediate and pressing problems by giving priority to the removal of the obstacles that prevented schools from connecting to the LEA's system, to the basic requirements of data transfer, including the pupil level annual school census, and to aspects of service delivery and training. They deserve credit for that, but the council as a whole does not yet have a strategy that builds quickly on their pragmatic foundations.

Recommendation

In order to improve the confidence of schools in the LEA's ICT service and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by electronic exchange of data and other information:

- publish and implement an ICT development plan that is capable of wide support across the education service and sets out clearly the council's vision for the provision and use of ICT across its education service.

114. These services are satisfactory. The council ensures that schools can, if they wish, access central contracts provided by its services. The majority of current users describe the services as at least satisfactory and mainly improving. The council's **cleaning and caretaking** service is bought by 54 per cent of primary and 23 per cent of secondary schools; the **grounds maintenance** by 16 per cent of primary and one secondary school. Most users of these services rate them as satisfactory or better, although a large number of schools have chosen to purchase from other providers. **Catering**, in comparison, is purchased from the council by 94 per cent of primary and 54 per cent of secondary schools, the large majority of whom describe the service as satisfactory or better.

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

115. This was not inspected fully in the previous inspection, although the professional development programme was a strength of the LEA. The LEA's work in ensuring the supply and quality of teachers is good and there is good capacity for further improvement.

116. The percentage of unfilled vacancies is similar to the national average and the LEA's own analysis highlights recruitment difficulties in schools in challenging circumstances and in shortage subjects. The recruitment and retention of teachers is a priority in EDP2. This was strongly supported by headteachers in the consultation and confirmed both by their full purchase of the recruitment service for the second consecutive year and the very positive school survey response. Support for recruitment and retention was rated better than satisfactory by more than 80 per cent of primary schools and was placed in the top quartile of LEA performance by secondary, special and nursery schools. Support for newly qualified teachers and continuous professional development was rated broadly average.

117. The LEA has embarked upon a vigorous approach to recruitment and retention, led by a recruitment strategy manager funded by the Teacher Training Agency. Early results are encouraging, with an increased number of applications for posts. A successful recruitment fair, new recruitment materials, good links with corporate recruitment to secure access to housing, and improved information to applicants have contributed to this success. The LEA is also promoting the 'Well Being' project to reduce staff absence and promote retention by improving morale. Initial responses and take-up rates from schools are promising, but it is too early to measure any impact.

118. The continued professional development programme, carefully designed to support teachers at different stages of their career, has some well-established strands and some areas the LEA has identified for further development. The relationship between appropriate continued professional development and retention is clearly understood. An effective programme for newly qualified teachers contributes to a retention rate into a second year in line with the national average. Although not part of the national project, the LEA deploys some retention funds to support teachers in their second and third year and is promoting bursaries for more experienced teachers. Support for middle management is being strengthened further. The Headlamp programme for new headteachers is provided through a brokered arrangement with a neighbouring authority. The percentage of headteachers taking part in an induction programme is below the national average and the quality of mentoring is variable. Support for supply teachers has been patchy to date, but it is now an entitlement in the new supply agency that has been set up as part of the LEA's recruitment work.

119. The LEA provides an appropriate range of courses through direct or brokered provision and the percentage of cancelled courses is below the national average. There is a well-reasoned strategy to move away from single day courses to short courses to improve the quality and effectiveness of the training. The LEA has rightly continued to broker support to cover those areas, particularly in the curriculum, where it does not have the expertise and it has a comprehensive list of consultants. The LEA has quality assurance mechanisms and much brokered work is deemed of high quality. However, a small number of schools express some uncertainty about accessing this provision and, in the case of secondary subject networks, note that the quality is too variable.

120. The LEA is promoting much valuable activity to support the supply and quality of teachers, despite some limitations in planning, data systems and organisational structure. The recruitment and retention priority in the revised EDP2, although improved, is based on limited data and the links between audit and activity are still not always clear. The recruitment strategy manager has rightly given considerable attention to ensuring baseline data is now in place. While the recruitment strategy manager and the officer responsible for continued professional development are working well together, their partnership does not arise naturally out of the service structure. Future planning would benefit from a more coherent approach to draw together the two strands of work.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

121. The last inspection found that the leadership, deployment, expertise and performance management of school improvement were all satisfactory or good. No detailed fieldwork was undertaken on these aspects during the current inspection. However, focus group discussions on related topics showed that schools generally find provision to be improving, and other evidence gained during this inspection reinforced that view.

Support for early years

122. Support for early years education remains satisfactory overall. Although Ofsted inspections show that standards of attainment and the quality of provision in schools and nursery units have improved, some issues identified during the last inspection remain unresolved. These include the review of quality and value for money of nursery provision across different sectors, hence the recommendation in the allocation of resources to priorities section of this report. Despite a slow start to address early years issues after the last inspection, there is now a gathering impetus and the LEA has a good capacity to improve.

123. During this inspection the cabinet approved a consultation document that will lead to the production of a strategic plan for early years. This provides a satisfactory framework, but it now requires more detailed working, some of which has begun. Consultation is currently taking place with all the partners of the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership and with parents on a proposed new admissions policy. Despite tensions over admissions and consultation in the past, relationships between the partnership members and the LEA are generally satisfactory and improving. This is due, in part, to positive leadership by LEA personnel, good quality training provision for early years staff in all settings and the increased involvement of an elected member who attends all partnership meetings.

124. Raising attainment in early years is priority one in EDP2 and appropriately addresses areas of weakness. The number of nursery schools identified by Ofsted inspections as being excellent or very good has increased since the last inspection and one has been awarded Beacon status. The Beacon nursery and the newly established Early Excellence Centre are being used very effectively to disseminate good practice.

125. The current capacity of nursery places for three and four year-olds exceeds 100 per cent. Take up of places among three year-olds is 105 per cent (due to some out-of-city placements), and there is 95 per cent take up among four year-olds. This exceeds the government target of 85 per cent. Provision for young children with additional and/or special

educational needs is good, and this is well integrated with social services and health provision. These demonstrate good multi-agency working practices and the LEA's commitment to inclusion in the early years phase.

Section 3: Special Educational Needs

Summary

126. In the last inspection, the LEA's arrangements for meeting special educational needs were satisfactory and providing sound value for money. There was, however, no overall strategy or coherent agreed vision for special educational needs. A satisfactory strategy is now in place. Under strong leadership, special educational needs are now being tackled with commitment and energy. Satisfactory progress has been made, although much of it is recent. However, aspects of the LEA's provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties need further consideration. There are now sound systems for meeting statutory obligations, supporting school improvement and raising standards. Substantial improvements have been made to special educational needs policy and aspects of provision. Links between the access and inclusion plans and EDP2 are satisfactory.

Strategy

127. The last inspection found the LEA's strategy for SEN to be poor. Significant progress has been made recently and the strategy is now satisfactory and its publication is imminent. It is readily accessible to a wide audience and demonstrates the LEA's commitment to inclusion in line with the Government's programme of action. However, further work is needed to draw up action plans for the priorities identified in the plan. Overall, good progress has been made and the LEA is demonstrating good capacity for further improvement.

128. The restructuring of the education service, integrating special educational needs support with school improvement under new leadership, has had a significant impact on progress. Policies have been prepared for inclusion, additional educational needs and for delegated funding. Extensive work has been done in consultation with schools on modelling an integrated pattern of inclusive provision. Most schools have welcomed the sustained consultation process, acknowledging the need for change and seeing in the LEA's actions a greater transparency and even-handedness than in the past. Targets related to the delegation of funding to schools have been met. Services have only been retained centrally where the majority of schools have opposed delegation and there have been good reasons for doing so, for example, sensory support because of its low incidence.

129. The pattern of special school provision continues much as before. However, the number of out-of-LEA placements has reduced and this has been achieved by increasing the capacity within the LEA, partly by change of age range in one special school, and by partnership working. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils with statements in mainstream rather than special schools as a result of the further development of the enhanced resource provision.

130. There are some weaknesses in the provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The LEA does not have its own school for these pupils and most are placed in mainstream schools with extra support and enhanced provision or in the pupil referral unit. Some of the schools in which these pupils are placed, despite their enhanced provision, find it difficult to cope with these placements.

131. Firm action has been taken on other fronts. The LEA has pressed ahead with the delegation of funding for special educational needs giving schools a funding regime in keeping with the Code of Practice. It has tightened the protocols for placing pupils so that best use can be made of the facilities already available. By investing, as part of the strategy, in a strong parent partnership service, it has greatly improved the capacity to resolve disputes.

Statutory obligations

132. In the last inspection, the LEA met its statutory obligations satisfactorily and thus a limited inspection of this aspect was undertaken. However, inspection evidence shows that considerable progress has been made and the LEA now meets its statutory obligations well. Scrutiny of the documentation indicates that the LEA has improved its rate of production of statements of special educational need, within 18 weeks, to almost 90 per cent. The appointment, in April 2002, of new inclusion assessment officers is having a marked effect on the rate. Statements are of good quality. The allocation of resources is carefully considered and matched to need but, rightly, statements do not necessarily attract additional resources.

133. The number of statements of pupils of school age has reduced as a result of better preventative work and better training for staff to support pupils at *school action plus* level of the new Code of Practice. Effective action has been taken to prepare schools for implementing the new Code of Practice by means of training for special educational needs co-ordinators and published guidance, incorporating appropriate criteria for assessing pupils. Statements are reviewed regularly and there is now a greater readiness to take action and discontinue a statement where appropriate.

134. The LEA has, sensibly, continued to build on its mechanisms for early intervention, at the pre-school and foundation stage, as well as in mainstream schools. Early education settings have identified special educational needs co-ordinators and the educational psychology service has developed strong links with the Early Years and Childcare Partnership and the providers of nursery education supported by it.

Special educational needs functions to support school improvement

135. The contribution the LEA makes to school improvement was satisfactory at the last inspection. It is now satisfactory with some strengths. The strengths lie in the good levels of support from the special educational needs support service, which includes learning support, counselling, sensory support and pre-school services. Many schools value the broader support now provided by the educational psychology service. Training courses are of high quality and well received. Good support is provided for special educational needs co-ordinators. There is every sign that senior LEA staff changes have high potential to strengthen it further. Although a special needs adviser has yet to be appointed, good challenge and support is provided in mainstream schools by the special needs consultant and, in special schools, by the school improvement officer.

136. Ofsted inspections show that pupils with special educational needs at all key stages make at least satisfactory progress, with the exception of a small percentage of pupils at Key Stage 2 whose progress is poor. The progress of over 64 per cent of these pupils at under five

and at Key Stages 1 and 2 is good. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the progress of 33 per cent of pupils with special educational needs is good. The LEA's attainment database is an increasingly effective tool to monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs.

137. The LEA is establishing clear procedures to monitor schools' spending of the delegated SEN budget and an analysis has been made of practice in schools. The new criteria are useful and the LEA intends to refine them progressively, informed by moderation visits by the head of inclusion to ten pilot schools. The moderation is based on clearly defined criteria and areas of spending.

138. The LEA has embarked on a number of initiatives in compliance with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. These include a re-issue of the amended special educational needs policy to bring it in line with the Act, a review of the LEA parent partnership services, an extensive training programme for schools on improving curricular access, target setting and supporting pupils' needs, training for governors and site audits for physical access. Twelve schools improved access for wheelchair users in 2001 and a further 17 projects are in hand during the current academic year. All these activities are within the spirit of the Act, and the LEA is making satisfactory progress in implementing its requirements.

Value for money

139. The previous report concluded that the LEA's support for SEN provided satisfactory value for money. The LEA has fully met the recommendations to clarify the rationale for deploying resources, to monitor provision more closely and to consult schools fully. Achieving this has also been a means to other ends, although the LEA's new approaches have yet to settle in and it is thus too soon to judge impact. However, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Value for money is now satisfactory with some strengths, with good capacity for further improvement.

140. Derby's expenditure on pupils with statements (10.5 per cent of its local schools budget) is within 0.1 per cent of both its statistical neighbours and unitary authorities. Its total spending on special educational needs (18.5 per cent of local schools budget) is about three per cent higher than those same comparators. Following the delegation of SEN budgets to primary schools this year, central costs are close to those of comparators. The difference in total spending is mainly explained by Derby's use of special educational needs factors in the comparatively large additional educational needs element of its delegated budget.

141. The new SEN strategy and other recent changes in monitoring arrangements have strengthened the LEA's capacity to ensure value for money. The overall approach is well designed to provide a clear view of how special educational needs funds are being spent and to link spending to pupil performance and school improvement. Clearer criteria have been introduced to inform decisions on funding and statutory assessment. Placements outside Derby are appropriately scrutinised and steps are in hand to fill some gaps in local provision.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

The strategy to promote social inclusion

142. The LEA's overall effectiveness in promoting social inclusion was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Progress has been made and Derby's performance in promoting social inclusion is now satisfactory with some strengths. There has been marked improvement in some areas, most notably in the provision for looked after children and in the way support is provided to help schools improve attendance. The council has agreed a statement of intent on inclusion and a new strategy and action plan are being drawn up. This will provide a more coherent framework for monitoring and prioritising work related to vulnerable or under-achieving groups. The LEA has a good capacity to secure further improvement.

143. A key strength is the principle of social inclusion that underpins major corporate plans, including the main strategic and statutory plans for education, and which is used to target funding. Appropriate attention is given, within EDP2 and other key plans, to raising the attainment, provision and support for vulnerable pupils. Effective joint working across departments, and between agencies, is developing. Some steps have been made in ensuring that comprehensive information and data on its most disadvantaged and vulnerable children are available, together with setting challenging targets for underachieving groups. However, the electronic dissemination of this information between agencies is under-developed.

144. The current initiatives are effective within their own parameters, but do not yet add up to a coherent strategy. Progress in developing an all-encompassing inclusion strategy and action plan had been slow, but there has been some rapid progress over the last two terms, and definite timescales have been set for the completion of the work.

The supply of school places

145. The last inspection reported that Derby was performing this function satisfactorily. Sufficiency of primary and surplus secondary places was being tackled, although the school organisation plan lacked information on the future of nursery and special schools.

146. This function is still performed satisfactorily, although there are weaknesses in the LEA's approach to primary school places. The recommendations of the last report have been carried out and there is good capacity to make further improvement.

147. The school organisation plan is clear and recent forecasts of pupil numbers have been well within acceptable parameters of accuracy. Officers now relate planning in this area to a wide range of factors including, for example, the asset management plan and school improvement activity. The school organisation committee, which is described in positive terms by its members who do not represent the LEA, meets regularly and has approved the school organisation plan. A working group, which includes headteachers and representatives from neighbouring authorities, is assessing the potential impact of plans for housing development along the city boundaries.

148. The projected trend in secondary numbers is for modest growth between 2002 and 2005 with numbers falling from 2006. The LEA has recently closed one secondary school. This was a politically sensitive decision, given local opposition, but the right one. The LEA is well positioned to manage secondary school places efficiently in the foreseeable future.

149. The position in the primary phase is more complicated. Overall, the number of surplus primary places, of about ten per cent, falls within acceptable parameters and is close to the average of Derby's statistical neighbours. However, around a quarter of the LEA's primary schools have more than 15 per cent surplus places, of which 11 have 25 per cent or more surplus places. The latter group is divided mainly between two areas of the city. In addition, the number of primary pupils in the city is forecast to fall steadily until at least 2007. Officers have assessed the position in terms of the costs and benefits, both financial and for pupils' achievement, and have concluded that, given other priorities, this does not yet merit the commitment needed to develop a strategic approach. Hence their current approach is to use, for example, capital programmes or the resignations of headteachers to review individual school cases.

150. The absence of a clearly articulated and debated strategy has a number of drawbacks, most immediately the lack of a plan for dealing with surplus places in at least five of the 11 worst affected schools. It also fosters insecurity, which, in turn, encourages budget hoarding by schools as insurance against a fluctuating number of admissions. It will, in time, limit the council's ability to review its early years provision effectively, to revise its arrangements for funding that provision or to deploy its capital stock in support of its corporate plan.

Recommendations

In order to manage the council's resources efficiently and to reassure schools about its planning for primary provision:

- secure the support of the school organisation committee and publish a clear statement describing the LEA's view of the number and location of primary schools required to meet the forecast numbers of primary age pupils; and
- take action to ensure improved management of places in schools approaching or above 15 per cent surplus places.

Admissions

151. The last inspection reported that the LEA dealt with admissions efficiently and effectively in the very difficult context of a large number of admissions authorities operating disparate arrangements. However, the arrangements for prioritising admissions to community schools and the timing of admissions to primary schools were not clear.

152. The LEA's strengths, notably the quality of its information to parents and the management of appeals, have been maintained. Despite this, there is widespread, and amongst primary schools, increasing concern about admissions. The LEA is not the admissions authority for 14 primary schools and, consequently, parents applying to more than

one school can, and do, receive more than one offer of a place.

153. At secondary transfer, the LEA is not the admissions authority for seven of the 13 schools and, although all 13 are represented in the parental handbook, there are at least five other timetables, in addition to the LEA's, operating for applications. Again, it is common for some families to have more than one acceptance and some to have none. At the time of the inspection, late September, secondary schools operating outside the LEA's arrangements were only just confirming their Year 7 admissions to the LEA. A much smaller proportion of parents in Derby secure their first preference at secondary transfer than comparable national and statistical neighbour averages (76 per cent in comparison with 87 per cent and 90 per cent).

154. The LEA has had limited success in resolving many of these problems through the admissions forum and intends to use powers in the Education Act 2002 to improve arrangements.

Recommendation

In order to improve the admission arrangements at primary/secondary transfer:

- in consultation with schools and parents use the Admissions Forum and statutory powers to ensure that admissions arrangements are properly co-ordinated.

Asset management

155. In the last report, Derby was described as having inherited poor building stock from its predecessor council and to have made a less than satisfactory start to resolving the resulting problems. Some technical aspects of its work were good, but funding arrangements were unclear. Although communication and relations with schools were not good, there were some signs of improvement.

156. The position is now satisfactory with some strengths, although progress has not been continuous. The recommendations from 2000, to be clearer about funding and to improve the dialogue with schools, have been carried out. A great deal has been achieved during this year by officers new to this area and, given the continuity of that leadership, there is good capacity for further improvement.

157. The LEA is working hard to tackle major difficulties in overcoming the legacy and ineffective planning described in the previous report. The conditions survey has identified a backlog of repairs, which will cost over £40 million to put right. A third of the primary schools and four of the nine secondary schools that responded to the schools survey rated the LEA's approach to asset management planning as less than satisfactory or poor; this represents an improvement on the previous survey.

158. The local policy statement and statement of priorities on asset management planning have been assessed as satisfactory by the DfES. A second round of conditions surveys has begun and schools recognise these are producing far better working documents. Most

schools now understand how the asset management priorities for action are identified. In both written and oral evidence, officers demonstrated good knowledge of the potential impact of asset management planning on school improvement activity.

159. The LEA has been successful in substantially increasing its capital programme. A year on year threefold increase in capital grants (from £5 million to £15 million) enabled it to plan capital expenditure of over £20 million in this financial year. It has secured initial approval for a Private Finance Initiative project estimated at £36 million. The two secondary and five primary schools involved account for about one sixth of the conditions backlog. The LEA aligns funding from other sources, including New Deal for Schools, Space for Sports and Arts and New Opportunities Funding to maximize benefits to schools. The corporate asset management planning includes and endorses the priority given to capital planning for the education service.

160. The LEA's asset management improvement group works effectively. It includes headteacher representatives in an increasingly transparent and improving approach to consultation. This group has contributed to discussions with schools about the use of devolved funding and the opportunities to use Seed Challenge and other matched funding to enhance minor projects in schools. There is increasing confidence among schools that the LEA understands their concerns and is working purposefully to deal with them.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

161. The last inspection found the provision for pupils with no school place to be satisfactory. The LEA's self-evaluation for this inspection confirms this is still the case. This aspect of the LEA's work was not inspected in detail. The inspection team judges that provision for pupils who have no school place continues to be satisfactory and that there has been some improvement since the last inspection. The LEA has provided evidence that the statutory obligation to arrange suitable provision for pupils without a school place has now been met, and all pupils in this category are in receipt of education for a minimum of 25 hours per week. The trend for reducing exclusions has continued over a three-year period and the percentage of pupils receiving alternative tuition, that have been reintegrated into mainstream education, is above the national average. A newly appointed education care officer focuses on the reintegration of pupils and the education welfare service offers advocacy for parents of secondary pupils who have been excluded. Parents have responded positively to this support and this has led to improved levels of reinstatements.

Attendance

162. The LEA's support for attendance is now satisfactory. At the last inspection it was unsatisfactory, but the LEA has made good progress and the judgement of the inspection team endorses the LEA's self-evaluation of the support it now provides. The school survey shows that primary and secondary schools rate support for attendance above satisfactory and significantly better than at the last inspection. All the weaknesses in strategy and management identified at that time have been addressed. Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is broadly in line with national averages, although authorised absence in the secondary sector is still slightly above the national average. It is reducing, however,

against a rising national trend. The LEA has set reasonable targets for improvement in EDP2.

163. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection. The role of the service has been clarified and a new service level agreement established. Comprehensive policy guidance has been published and circulated to schools. The LEA has made good use of external funding to contribute towards increasing the number of education welfare staff, which has tripled since the last inspection. Three schools with poor attendance records have bought in their own education welfare officer using delegated funding and attendance in these schools is improving. Forty-four schools have taken advantage of training provided by the education welfare service, focusing on strategies to improve attendance.

164. A number of other new initiatives have been put in place since the last inspection. An education welfare officer works specifically with looked after children and the attendance of these children is improving. A team of three education welfare officers work on establishing preventative strategies in schools when requested to do so. Relationships with other agencies such as social services are well established and an education welfare officer works with the police conducting truancy sweeps within the city twice a week. Joint working arrangements have also been established with Education Action Zone, Connexions and work with the Excellence Clusters initiative has begun.

165. The service is now allocated to schools in proportion to need. Educational welfare officers use visits to schools to check registers and identify cases needing support and investigation in co-operation with school staff. The proportions of home visits, warnings and prosecutions have all risen sharply, and have begun to improve the attendance of persistent non-attenders. The LEA is demonstrating a good capacity to improve and is providing satisfactory value for money in this area.

Behaviour support

166. The LEA's support for behaviour was satisfactory at the 2000 inspection. The inspection team judges that LEA support has improved and now has some strengths. A limited inspection of this aspect of the LEA's work was undertaken. The new behaviour support plan is of good quality and defines the LEA's strategy and support mechanisms, clearly including cross-agency working. The priorities identified by schools in the consultation process are reflected in the plan and most schools consider the LEA is making good progress towards improving behaviour management. Permanent exclusions have reduced steadily over the last three years in both phases, although permanent exclusions in the primary phase were slightly above the national average. Fixed term exclusions are in line with national averages.

167. Good quality training is being provided for behaviour co-ordinators in schools and skill levels have risen significantly since the last inspection. Training is tailored to the expressed needs of individuals or schools. Behaviour support co-ordinators in mainstream schools are well supported by the LEA. Most schools have bought back the LEA's behaviour support services. All but two secondary schools have bought the LEA's support package. The funding in the primary sector was only fully delegated in September 2002 and 80 per cent of these schools are already buying into the package.

168. The LEA has embarked on a number of initiatives to support its policy. For example, it is piloting a mentoring scheme, as a preventative strategy in which at-risk Year 9 pupils are given some responsibility for helping Year 7 pupils on entry to secondary schools. The behaviour support service is preparing support materials based on good practice in dealing with behaviour problems. It is providing an induction programme for pupils in the pupil referral unit who have moved to a 100 per cent timetable for the first time this year. The educational psychology service is also providing support to these pupils. Learning support units, based on eight secondary schools, help to ensure that behaviour management is supported in those schools.

169. Despite the strengths in behaviour support, difficulties remain in the LEA's support for some of the most challenging pupils. Those pupils who are reintegrated into mainstream education are presenting significant challenges for certain schools, despite additional resources and schools' commitment to social inclusion. This is particularly true where the proportion of pupils in the school with behavioural problems, or other specific needs, is already very high. There is no history of collaboration between schools, working in partnership with the LEA, to tackle these problems collectively and consider the overall pattern of reintegration into schools.

Recommendation

In order to ensure the LEA's strategy for supporting challenging pupils and those pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is effective:

- work collaboratively with schools to review the full range of provision for these pupils to ensure that it is efficient, meets pupils' needs and is equitable for all schools.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

170. The LEA's provision for health, safety, welfare and child protection was assessed as good during the last inspection. Schools' views and the LEA's own view indicate that it is still good. No detailed fieldwork was conducted in this inspection. The last inspection report indicated that there was appropriate monitoring and guidance for health, safety and security issues and that statutory duties in relation to child protection were fulfilled. The quality of training was good. The documentary evidence presented for this inspection and the Ofsted reports of school inspections indicate that these strengths continue. Furthermore, the documents illustrate that sound protocols and procedures for contractors and various services within the LEA are in place. From the available evidence, the inspection team judges that the provision in this area continues to be good and that the high standards, set at the time of the last inspection, have been maintained.

Looked after children

171. Support for looked after children was unsatisfactory at the last inspection, but considerable improvement is evident and it is now satisfactory with some strengths. Most of the weaknesses reported have been addressed satisfactorily, though some require further

work. A strategy and action plan are in place and are of good quality. Since the last inspection, there has been high involvement of elected members in the development of the service. The cabinet members for lifelong learning and for social care, for example, have helped to lend impetus to the improvements in the service and have played a prominent part in celebrating the achievements of these pupils.

172. There is now a firm protocol, and a service level agreement, for joint working between the education and social services departments with clear arrangements for the funding and management of the service. Links are developing well with other agencies such as the health trusts and Connexions. The data relevant to the pupils is comprehensive and easily accessible to all parties, though electronic transfer of data is not yet efficiently functional. Checks are made to ensure that personal education plans contain sufficiently demanding targets for individual pupils and the LEA analyses performance data at the end of each key stage. Appropriate targets are set and progress on their achievement is reported to elected members.

173. Improving the attainment of looked after children is an explicit target in EDP2 and the LEA is well placed to meet national targets. The strategies to achieve this have been developed in consultation with social services and form part of a local project funded by the Gatsby Foundation. Links to other plans are not yet well developed, but activities to make stronger links and provide a more co-ordinated approach to supporting school improvement and pupil achievement are included in the EDP. Last year, the attainment of Key Stage 1 pupils in public care showed significant improvement at Level 2 on the previous year's results in each of the subject areas. At Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 the results dipped slightly when compared with the previous year's results, but were broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of Key Stage 4 pupils gaining one or more GCSE passes at grade G and above was markedly higher, representing a sharp upward trend, being greater than that of significant neighbours or the national average. The percentage of pupils, who have been in public care, progressing to further education and training in 2001, at 54 per cent, was significantly above the national average of 41 per cent.

174. Deployment of staff and resources to support these pupils is generally good. For example, an education welfare officer and an education care officer are based at the residential home and a homework room and ICT facilities have now been provided in the home. All schools have designated teachers for looked after children, and all are trained. However, the service has yet to monitor how effectively these teachers are disseminating information, with regard to these pupils, amongst other members of staff. Extensive multi-agency training has taken place, which has been well received by participants. Good progress has been made in preparing personal education plans for the majority of pupils.

Measures to combat racism

175. The last inspection judged this aspect of the LEA's work to be satisfactory with some strengths. Aspects of the work have continued to improve, but because of certain weaknesses it is not yet good. Nevertheless, the LEA has a good capacity to make further improvement.

176. The council has responded to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 by producing a race equality scheme on which consultation is currently taking place. Having

achieved Level 2 of the Commission for Racial Equality's standards, the council is now working towards Level 3. Equal opportunities targets have been set for service areas. The education department has redrafted its policy statement, and has undertaken ethnic monitoring of its own staff. A large number of education officers have taken part in race awareness training. These initiatives demonstrate a significant corporate commitment to combating racism.

177. The education department has worked on a long-term basis with a local partnership to reduce racist harassment, and has recently increased its commitment to this work. It has agreed an important protocol with the police force, whereby information concerning potential racist activity will be shared on an informal basis and, commendably, secondary schools have also entered this arrangement. The LEA is involved with partners in campaigns to encourage young people against racism, and is involved in an innovative project with the race equality council to reduce racial bullying. This partnership working demonstrates the education department's desire to work against racism on a broad front, which is also reflected in the work of the standing advisory council for religious education. The director of education gave sound advice to schools about potential community tensions in the aftermath of the attacks of 11th September 2001 in the USA. Various teams within the education department are involved in action to improve race relations, such as the development of citizenship education, participation in cross-community cultural events, and the monitoring of exclusions. The LEA's guidance to schools on cultural diversity is very good, and it runs major conferences that attract national speakers.

178. The LEA's new procedures for monitoring schools give good attention to race equality and school improvement officers will be exploring these issues during this term. However, about 20 per cent of schools have not completed the racist incident recording procedure, and some have not fully complied with the new arrangements for recording pupils' ethnic identity. The LEA therefore still has to persuade some schools of the significance of this work.

179. There are some aspects of the LEA's work that have weaknesses. The education department has not yet monitored the ethnic composition of the teaching and non-teaching school workforce, or of the membership of governing bodies. It has introduced the procedure through which schools record racist incidents, but has not yet analysed the overall findings in any depth. Hence it is not yet making good use of available information to develop locally focused strategies for combating racism. Consultation with minority communities is organised principally with community leaders and the LEA has yet to exploit fully the opportunities to build on existing work involving young people and thereby to extend the reach of consultation.

Recommendation

In order to combat racism more effectively:

- in consultation with the police and other partners, make greater use of schools' records of racist incidents to devise a strategy for anticipating and combating racism locally; and
- with the co-operation of foundation and voluntary schools, monitor the ethnic

composition of the teaching and non-teaching school workforce, and of governing bodies, to provide data for future recruitment policies.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Summary

180. This LEA is much improved since the last inspection because officers and elected members have worked conscientiously to address the criticisms made in the report. They have taken, and acted upon, consultancy advice to strengthen strategic capacity, and recognised the need to restore relationships with schools. In terms of structures and policies, much has been achieved, but the impact is not yet evident. Similarly, the council's planning and decision-making processes are now clear, although not yet sufficiently rigorous in practice. Hence, despite its progress thus far, the LEA still has some way to go to ensure that reality consistently matches its rhetoric.

Corporate planning

181. Corporate planning for education was poor at the time of the 2000 inspection, as were the procedures for implementing and evaluating the plans. Although there was a strong commitment to lifelong learning in the council's mission statement and mechanisms to facilitate corporate working, there was no corporate plan setting out the vision and overall strategy. The council has made satisfactory progress in addressing the weaknesses and both planning and implementation of plans are now broadly satisfactory.

182. The council's corporate plan was published in May 2002. Education is the first of six key themes identified in the plan, expressed in the phrase 'more achievement, more achievers'. This is appropriately amplified to relate to high quality educational opportunities for all, raising standards of achievement and supporting individuals to reach their potential. Each theme is related to the council's ten priorities. One of these is to make sure that all services contribute to learning and that education is central to the council's plans. Other priorities link education to the council's inclusion and regeneration priorities. The sources of funding for the priorities are clearly identified, although the rationale for the foci within each priority is not explicit. There are too few measurable outcomes in the plan and it is not always clear how impact will be measured and reported.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of planning and to enable members, officers and schools to monitor and evaluate related activities:

- ensure that, at every level in the LEA's work, all plans contain clear deadlines for action and specific targets for the outputs and outcomes expected; and
- make effective use of data to inform all stages of planning.

183. There has been a noticeable effort to ensure consistency between the corporate plan, the Best Value Performance Plan and other plans. At minimum, this is indicated by specific reference in almost all plans to the six themes and ten priorities in the corporate plan. Only the better plans work out the detailed implications. For example, the education service strategic plan makes links with the corporate plan and the Best Value Performance Plan,

albeit in general terms, but also identifies links with other, more specific, plans. However, although the annex of achievements in this plan covers a comprehensive range, there is no attempt to classify or prioritise them and there is a dearth of measurable outcomes. While the planning structures are now in place and links and connections are more explicit, the quality of plans and the subsequent analysis of their impact lacks precision.

184. The council has a clear combined corporate and budget planning process, linked with public consultation, in which all directorates are involved. Procedures for reporting progress are also clear. There are clear lines of accountability. Specific performance indicators are used to inform performance management. Although the structures are in place, there is acknowledged to be inconsistent practice across services. Management information is supplemented usefully through Investors in People assessment. The placing of performance management within the remit of the director of finance, and thus linking with resources, is a sound strategic move.

Decision making

185. The council's decision making was criticised in the 2000 inspection for its lack of clarity. Council members lacked sufficient knowledge about the work of the education department and the outcomes of decisions. They were thus not sufficiently informed to influence decision making.

186. The decision-making processes set out in the revised constitution, effective from December 2001, are clear in respect of the role of the cabinet, the overview and scrutiny commission for lifelong learning and culture, and the full council. The powers delegated to the director of education are explicit. To this extent, the recommendation from the previous inspection has been met.

187. However, although the formal decision-making processes are clear, this is not yet fully born out by confident practice. This is, in part, a result of the changes the council has recently undergone, including the high proportion of new members elected across all parties in the May 2002 elections. At this time key roles, including that of the leader, the cabinet member for lifelong learning, and the chair of the overview and scrutiny commission were undertaken by members new to their posts. Several members of the commission were also newly elected.

188. The inspection team has less confidence in the processes for review. In particular, the working of the lifelong learning and culture overview and scrutiny commission is not yet leading to close examination of policy decisions. This is partly because members are not yet secure with new systems or with the information they receive, although their training for the role has been comprehensive. More importantly, the commission's approach to its wide-ranging remit may prevent it from giving education matters the priority they require as well as fulfilling other responsibilities. In addition, the relationship between the commission and the newly established education evaluation panel is unclear. Without a clear and fully understood remit, this panel runs the risk of muddying the decision-making process and undermining relationships, however laudable the intentions.

Recommendation**In order to ensure decisions are subject to appropriate scrutiny:**

- review the working of the overview and scrutiny commission and its associated groups to ensure all remits are clear and their operation is effective and transparent.

189. Members are provided with clear advice through the access that all have to cabinet papers as well as through presentations from officers on key issues. A presentation by an assistant director to the overview and scrutiny commission on the strategy for pupils with special educational needs is one example of a timely input to members. There is some evidence that the timing and quantity of information provided to members needs to be monitored and reviewed, but this is a consequence of the embedding of new structures rather than a lack of commitment on the part of either officers or members.

190. The quality of the council's monitoring and evaluation of the impact of its decisions is variable at present. This, in part, reflects weaknesses in planning documents, where success criteria lack precision or where there are no interim measures to enable members to check progress. There are, however, clear procedures for regular checking of progress against the main performance indicators through the role of cabinet members. Performance management structures are in place, but there is some inconsistency in its application across the council as well as within the education service.

191. Since the time of the previous inspection, elected members have demonstrated some ability to take difficult decisions, as in the management of the politically sensitive closure of a secondary school. They have shown similar determination in preparing a Private Finance initiative bid to tackle the problem of poor school buildings which, reportedly, would have been unacceptable to many members a relatively short time ago.

192. The council now has a clear commitment to improved consultation with schools and has established a comprehensive system of consultation groups. These groups are well briefed by the LEA and there is evidence of greater understanding on the part of officers and school representatives of the issues involved. The consultation over the schools' budget for 2002-03 is a good example of improved consultation. It is also an example of how both members and schools are having to address the legacy of the past, in this instance, schools' mistrust of the council over educational spending. The depth of that mistrust was evident in the low baseline of relationships between the LEA and schools reported in the last inspection. The LEA and many of its schools are now committed to improving that relationship. Development is at an early stage as the LEA has only recently been fully staffed and thus capable of introducing the systems it knows are required. On their side, schools are cautious about the stability and durability of changes which most welcome. However, some schools appear to be reluctant to accept that the LEA, rightly, may have policies, for example on social inclusion, which mean that some of its decisions will not be equally agreeable to all schools. Building trust therefore remains a continuing challenge to which the LEA and schools both need to contribute.

193. Relationships between senior officers and elected members are now good. Elected members have confidence in the educational management team and in its capacity to take the

LEA forward. Regular meetings between the director for education and the cabinet member for lifelong learning ensure mutual awareness of emerging issues. These are complemented by meetings, which are also attended by the director of social services and other cabinet members, to work on overlapping council priorities.

The leadership provided by officers and elected members

194. At the time of the previous inspection, the leadership of elected members was poor and that of officers was unsatisfactory. Schools had lost confidence in members, not least because delays on critical decisions left schools feeling vulnerable. Members considered that schools' discontent, as reflected in the school survey, was due to unfortunate timing rather than, as the inspection team judged, a summing up of the real state of affairs. Schools, feeling let down by the council, were questioning its commitment to working in partnership with them. The brief of the executive member for lifelong learning was deemed to be too extensive for any one individual to manage; that recommendation in the report has been appropriately addressed in the remit for the new cabinet member. The director of education had only recently taken up post and was beginning to address the legacy of disrupted leadership, which the LEA had experienced since becoming a unitary authority.

195. The leadership of elected members is now satisfactory overall. They have a clear sense of the importance of education. This is reflected both in the council's planning, including the new corporate plan, in the targeting of its financial resources and in the engagement of key members. There is also evidence that elected members now engage more with the educational issues and less with party politics than was the case in the former committee system. At present schools have only limited awareness of current members' commitment to education and a vast legacy of negative experiences, but there is a determination by key members to address this. The new cabinet member for lifelong learning has, in a short space of time, done much to raise the profile of the council with schools and to begin repairing the fractured relationships of the past. Both the cabinet member for lifelong learning and the leader of the council are taking part in Derby's first residential conference for headteachers, focusing on a review of the vision and aims of the LEA, again indicating a firm level of commitment. Inspection evidence suggests that the relationship between members and officers is a proper one, where close working is effective in achieving results. There is an onus on members and officers alike to ensure that roles and responsibilities remain defined in practice as well as on paper and on schools to judge current elected members on their own performance and not that of their predecessors.

196. The education service has undertaken a major restructuring of the senior management since the last inspection. The specific proposals came out of the work with the improvement and development agency (IDeA) and a private consultant, which followed the inspection. The final appointment to an assistant director post was not taken up until February 2002. Although regretting that appointments could not be secured earlier, schools endorse the LEA's decision to wait and ensure the right appointments are made. Schools, elected members, officers and partners express confidence in the new senior management team, which is well founded.

197. The leadership of senior officers is satisfactory overall, with significant strengths in the education management team. The team has a clear vision for education, not least that

expressed in the relationship between school improvement and inclusion. However, not all schools and lower tier officers have fully understood or ‘caught’ the vision yet. The LEA acknowledges that, in part, this is attributable to the pace of change. The need to address a pressing list of issues after the last inspection precluded senior officers from engaging with schools in debate about the vision. This was valid at the time, but a shared understanding of the vision for education in Derby City and its implications is now critical to the LEA’s further development and, in particular, its relationship with schools. The last inspection report commented on the need to help schools to understand the role of a modern LEA. Much has been achieved and most relationships with schools are productive, but the LEA is still challenged both by schools seeking a high level of support and by those resentful of any LEA role. For these, as for all schools, the LEA’s vision has to be more than words on a page.

Recommendation

To ensure that the LEA’s vision for education is fully understood by schools, partners, members and officers:

- actively promote regular discussion of what the LEA’s vision means in practice for all stakeholders.

198. Taking the LEA forward from the last inspection has been demanding for its senior officers and, in particular, for its director. He has been successful in ensuring that education is at the heart of the council’s thinking and that education has improving access to funding streams. The chief executive has provided appropriate support, recognising that the LEA was engaged in transforming culture. This has involved a strategic approach to partnership working, in which both the chief executive and the director have played a crucial role. Within the department, almost all plans and policies are now in place, albeit with an acknowledged variation in quality. Most appointments have been made to the restructured service below senior management level, although the management structures have yet to be fully embedded in working practices across teams. There is a clear capacity for continued improvement.

Partnership

199. Partnership between the LEA and external agencies was satisfactory at the time of the 2000 inspection. It benefited from strong commitment to partnership working and there were developing relationships with a wide range of partners. Partnership has since improved further and there are several strengths. The LEA clearly has the commitment and capacity to develop its partnership working further, and become good.

200. Senior officers, in particular the director of education, have made a major commitment to developing partnership work. Partners, including the professional associations and the diocese, are complimentary of the LEA’s strategic understanding and the lead it is taking. Similarly, the LEA is a valued contributor to the standing advisory council for religious education. There is a clear recognition of the significance of partnership working from the chief executive and the leader of the council. This commitment has been influential in the recent restructuring of the local strategic partnership, Derby City partnership, and on raising the profile of schools within its priorities. Although some partners have questioned the lead the LEA has taken with its schools in promoting partnerships in the past, there is now a clear consensus from all partners that the LEA is well placed to strengthen this work

further. The expertise and influence of the recently appointed assistant directors have already contributed to this. However, the evidence of the school survey is that schools have yet to be convinced of the LEA's effectiveness in working in partnership with other agencies. As with other aspects of the work of the LEA, and given the range of partnerships in Derby, this is partly attributable to some lack of communication about what the LEA is doing and why. The LEA recognises this and is beginning to address it.

201. A number of Derby's partnerships work well at both strategic and operational levels. Many reflect the clear link Derby has made between school improvement and social inclusion, with work focused on support for vulnerable groups. A good example of this is the Gatsby Foundation project for looked after children linking education, social services and health at strategic and operational levels, which is improving provision for these children and raising their attainment. Another example is the LEA's work with the Drug and Alcohol Action Team, with commitment at a strategic level from an assistant director and at operational level by an adviser.

202. At the time of the last inspection an Education Action Zone had been established in the city. An Excellence Cluster was established in September 2002. The partnership between the LEA and the Education Action Zone has strengthened support to schools for the national strategies, although wider dissemination has been limited. Recent joint planning between the Education Action Zone director and an assistant director has the potential to bring greater coherence to school improvement work across the LEA and provide a sound framework to structure future development.

Appendix: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:

In order to ensure that the LEA's vision for education is fully understood by schools, partners, members and officers:

- actively promote regular discussion of what the LEA's vision means in practice for all stakeholders.

In order to clarify the strategy for school improvement:

- work with schools to produce a straightforward strategic statement of a shared vision for school improvement.

In order to improve the effectiveness of planning and to enable members, officers and schools to monitor and evaluate related activities:

- ensure that, at every level in the LEA's work, all plans contain clear deadlines for action and specific targets for the outputs and outcomes expected; and
- make effective use of data to inform all stages of planning.

In order to improve the funding mechanism for schools and promote consensus:

- assess the impact of current funding arrangements for under fives provision and the additional educational needs elements in the school funding formula and, in consultation with schools across the phases, revise those arrangements.

In order to improve the confidence of schools in the LEA's ICT service and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by electronic exchange of data and other information:

- publish and implement an ICT development plan that is capable of wide support across the education service and sets out clearly the council's vision for the provision and use of ICT across its education service.

However, the following recommendations are also fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

In order to improve the capacity of schools to budget effectively in support of school improvement activity:

- provide appropriate challenge to primary schools with surpluses in excess of ten per cent and secondary schools in excess of five per cent; and
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- assess, in consultation with schools, the effect of the funding formula on school budget surpluses.

In order to manage the council's resources efficiently and to reassure schools about its planning for primary provision:

- secure the support of the school organisation committee and publish a clear statement describing the LEA's view of the number and location of primary schools required to meet the forecast numbers of primary age pupils; and
- take action to ensure improved management of places in schools approaching or above 15 per cent surplus places.

In order to ensure that the system of monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools is operating validly and robustly:

- use Best Value principles to review the system after two years, with an interim report after one year, and with particular focus on the extent to which the LEA makes independent judgements derived from evidence.

In order to improve the LEA's support for curriculum ICT:

- develop a clear strategy which:
 - is based on an audit of standards and practice in schools; and
 - is supported by a development plan with specific and measurable outcomes to defined timescales and with clear responsibilities; and
- in consultation with schools, review the staffing of ICT support to ensure there is sufficient high quality staffing to target schools' needs.

In order to ensure the LEA's strategy for supporting challenging pupils and those pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is effective:

- work collaboratively with schools to review the full range of provision for these pupils to ensure that it is efficient, meets pupils' needs and is equitable for all schools.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to improve the contribution schools make to service development and to enhance their capacity to act as informed purchasers of services:

- provide training for headteachers, governors and bursars in the application of Best Value principles.

In order to ensure maximum transparency and to assist school self-evaluation:

- provide each school with the data product deriving from the LEA's desk-top analysis in time for the autumn term discussions with the school improvement officer.

In order to equip schools better to analyse and improve their performance:

- identify schools' needs in data analysis, and secure training provision as required, drawing on the potential of the national pupil database, and the pupil-level analyses currently provided by the LEA; and
- in discussion with schools, establish an improved system for the transfer of pupil-level data when pupils enter secondary school.

In order to improve the standards achieved by gifted and talented pupils:

- identify clearly the respective roles of the LEA and the Excellence Cluster; and
- establish a clear, resourced strategy for identifying and meeting schools' and pupils' needs.

In order to improve relations with schools and to implement Best Value practice across the education service:

- implement the recommendation in the previous report, to provide more information to schools on alternative providers; and
- assess, in consultation with schools, the potential for the provision of a brokerage service in Derby.

In order to improve the property service to special schools:

- in consultation with special schools, assess the quality of property services they have received from the council or elsewhere in the past two years and take appropriate action.

In order to improve the admission arrangements at primary/secondary transfer:

- in consultation with schools and parents use the Admissions Forum and statutory powers to ensure that admissions arrangements are properly co-ordinated.

In order to combat racism more effectively:

- in consultation with the police and other partners, make greater use of schools' records of racist incidents to devise a strategy for anticipating and combating racism locally; and
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- with the co-operation of foundation and voluntary schools, monitor the ethnic composition of the teaching and non-teaching school workforce, and of governing bodies, to provide data for future recruitment policies.

In order to ensure decisions are subject to appropriate scrutiny:

- review the working of the overview and scrutiny commission and its associated groups to ensure all remits are clear and their operation is effective and transparent.