**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

INSPECTION OF
DERBY CITY
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

1.   This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of the local education authority (LEA) 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 data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports and audit reports on documentation and discussions with LEA members, focus groups of headteacher, governors, teachers, professional associations, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. Many of the LEA partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 92 per cent.

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

COMMENTARY

4.   Derby City LEA's start was a sad one because of the illness and subsequent death of its new director in whom many put great faith.   At a time when schools in this new LEA needed leadership and direction, the Council failed to provide it. As a result there was a long spell when there was poor strategic leadership which impeded management and co-ordination of the education services. Throughout this time, communications and consultation with schools deteriorated.   These factors resulted in schools mistrusting the Council's commitment to education and, together with their discovery that the funding available to them was less than the standard spending assessment (SSA), led to an uneasy relationship between the schools and the Council.

5.   The Council's aspiration of making Derby a 'city of learning' is applauded, but it needs to be clearer about how to achieve its goal. The Council has no corporate plan setting out its strategy and means of achieving its aims. Additionally, the Council's decision-making processes are unclear, and it has no effective means of carrying out scrutiny of its decisions.

6.   Officers provide sound advice for elected members, but the decisions which have been taken have not always resulted in improvements in the education service. Despite this, and the lack of strategic direction, a number of services have performed effectively and schools acknowledge the contribution made by many individuals in the department.

7.   A new director took up appointment in June 2000 and has begun to consolidate the work of the LEA and its schools. Communications with schools are beginning to improve, and there is a desire to involve them more fully in consultation. Schools are beginning to display a measured optimism in the way in which the LEA is moving, but weaknesses continue to outweigh strengths.

8.   Derby's population is in many ways similar to the national average. Although standards are rising in line with the national rate they are below average, and lower than those which the city's pupils are capable of achieving.

9.   The LEA's support for school improvement is variable. It is effective in the following areas:

- support for raising standards in literacy and numeracy;
- support to school management;
- support for health and safety, welfare and child protection;
- support for minority ethnic pupils;
- support to combat racism;
- budget monitoring and control; and
- support for financial services.

10. A significant number of the LEA's remaining functions are exercised satisfactorily, but the following are carried out unsatisfactorily or poorly:

- the leadership provided by elected members;
- corporate planning and aspects of strategic management;
- funding available to schools;
- targeting of resources on priorities;
- structures for achieving Best Value;
- the way in which the LEA has helped schools to understand its role in relation to monitoring, challenge, intervention and support;
- support to schools for the use of performance data;
- support to schools for information and communication technology in the curriculum;
- support to governors;
- strategy for special educational provision;
- support for school attendance;
- support for children in public care; and
- payroll services.

11. The LEA has the capacity within the department – in its leadership and the quality of a significant number of middle managers – to continue the improvements which have so recently begun, and to achieve more effective and harmonious work with its schools. However, the LEA can respond to the current agenda and improve only if members take more appropriate and consistently supportive action in translating the educational aspirations of the community into clear strategies, and in supporting their officers and schools with the resources and management freedom needed to carry them out. Officers alone cannot bring about change. Schools must also put the past behind them and work with officers and members to create an education service which the people of Derby deserve, and which those in the education service want.

12. It will be necessary for OFSTED to appraise the LEA's progress in meeting the recommendations in this report. It is recommended that another inspection take place within two years.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13.   Derby City LEA was established in April 1997 and assumed responsibility for education services which had previously been administered by Derbyshire County Council. The LEA, after an initially promising start, faltered because the director appointed to launch it suffered an extended illness, resigned, and subsequently died. From the beginning of the director's illness to autumn 1999 his responsibilities were carried jointly by the three, and, for a time, only two, assistant directors while the chief executive took over the titular role of director of education. The post of director remained unfilled until September 1999. The Council then made an appointment of an acting director who remained until the current director took up his appointment in June 2000, after the third time of advertising.

14.   In relation to the proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, ethnic minority pupils and adults with higher education qualifications, the LEA is in line with the national average. The school-age population has increased over recent years. Unemployment figures have declined but are marginally higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils with statements for special educational provision is above the national average.

15.   The LEA maintains eight nursery, 26 infant, 18 junior, 34 primary, 14 secondary and five special schools. Six of the secondary schools cater for 11-16 year olds; eight for the 11-18 age-range. Of the 108 schools, nine are foundation, 12 voluntary aided and one voluntary controlled. Thirty-six of the infant or primary schools have attached nursery classes. The LEA provides a part-time place in mainstream nursery schools or classes for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents want one.

Performance of schools

16.   Key features of school and pupil performance based on the results for the end of the academic year 2000:

- attainment on entry to primary schools is below the national average;
- attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is in line with the national average in English and mathematics;
- attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is below the national average in English, mathematics and science;
- attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below the national average in English and mathematics and in line in science;
- at GCSE, the percentage of pupils attaining five A* to C grades is below the national average. The percentage attaining one A* to G grade is broadly in line with the national average. Attainment in terms of Average Points Score (APS) is below the national figure;
- at age 18 the percentage of pupils attaining two or more A levels is below the national average;

- improvement in performance in national tests has risen in line with the national averages between 1995 and 2000;
- attendance in primary and secondary schools is in line with the national average. Rates of authorised and unauthorised absence are also in line with the national average;
- permanent exclusions from primary and secondary schools are well above the national average; and
- sixty four per cent of pupils educated in Derby city schools stayed on in full-time educational provision post-16.

Funding

17.   Derby City's education SSA per pupil is slightly below the mean for unitary authorities and in each year since vesting spending on education has been below SSA. Reserves were used to support the Council budget in the first year, then the Council rightly embarked on a programme of cuts to bring overall Council expenditure in line with income. Although school budgets were not subject to cuts, the education budget fell further below SSA. It is currently at 99 per cent of SSA. However, commitments already made by the Council, but not communicated fully to schools, will bring spending back almost to SSA next year.

18.   Within the overall education budget, spending on children under five is higher than SSA by 39 per cent, owing in part to the high unit costs of nursery schools; adult, youth and community education spends nine per cent more than SSA. Although both of these are pointers to Derby's commitment to lifelong learning, it results in the local schools budget (LSB) being one of the lowest of the unitaries, at £2,699 per pupil compared to an average of £2,791.

19.   Under Fair Funding legislation, expenditure is retained from the LSB to carry out statutory central functions, key elements of which are shown below:

Expenditure (£ per pupils)		
Fair funding category	Derby City	Average Unitary
Administration + strategy	71	84
School improvement	20	25
Access*	77	62
Special needs	187	152

*The relatively high access comparison is explained by the fact that some LEAs have delegated school meals to primary schools, while others, like Derby, have not.

20.   Central spending is generally in line with unitary authorities, apart from special educational needs. This has been recognised by the LEA and is beginning to be reduced. The relatively high retention of funds for special educational needs is mainly responsible for the level of delegation being lower than average at 83 per cent compared to the unitary average of 84.2 per cent.

21.   Although, this year, the LEA has met the government's targets for delegation and passing on increased funding to schools, the net effect of all the factors outlined above is that the average amount delegated to schools is only £2,242 per pupil,

compared to £2,349 per pupil in the average unitary. This puts the funding available for Derby schools in the bottom 25 per cent of unitary authorities.

22. The Council has been successful in accessing considerable amounts of grant related monies; most notably £50 million over the next five years from the single regeneration budget (SRB). The Council is taking action to increase grant related funding and is to appoint an officer to bid for and manage such projects. Capital expenditure has been increasing steadily from £2.4 million in 1997-98, to £4.1 million in 1999-2000. Indications are that in excess of £8 million will be spent in 2000-01.

Council structure

23. The Council has 44 members. Labour has overall control with 29 seats, nine are Conservative and six are held by Liberal Democrat members. The Council responded to the government's modernising agenda and set up a cabinet style of political management in January 2000 and is now reviewing the way it operates. The Council delegates most decisions to its chief officers, in consultation with lead members, but important policy and strategic decisions are made by the Council itself.

24. There are a number of regulatory committees and two policy committees, one specifically related to education. There is one Best Value committee and four Best Value sub-committees. The remit of these is to commission reviews and investigations and agree the resulting final reports. The sub-committees report to the Best Value committee, the chief functions of which are to allocate work programmes to itself and its sub-committees, oversee the Best Value process and evaluate the results of reviews and make recommendations to Council. A programme of Best Value reviews has begun, and although documentation states that the sub-committees will perform the scrutiny role, there is, in fact, very little effective scrutiny of the work of elected members. The interactions of the various committees are not clear. The Council is aware of these weaknesses but has not yet resolved them.

25. There are two policy committees which report directly to the Council. Their remit is to take urgent decisions, make recommendations to Council, although the main policy committee controls finances. Advisory committees serve to inform cross-party members in order that they can, from a strong knowledge base, evaluate aspects of the LEA's and schools' work. The effectiveness of these political systems is described later.

Education Development Plan

26. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is mainly sound, though it has some unsatisfactory features. The original plan was published in spring 1999, and was revised a year later to take account of a further analysis of needs and developments.

27.   The priorities set out in the revision are unchanged from those of the original plan. They are:

•   improving standards of literacy;
•   improving standards of numeracy;
•   improving standards of information and communication technology;
•   raising achievement among underachieving groups;
•   improving leadership, planning and quality of teaching;
•   improving achievement in the early years;
•   improving continuity and progression between key stages;
•   schools of concern.

28.   These reflect both national and local issues and include two that are distinctive for Derby. The plan is supplemented by the draft education department service plan. This gives an overview of all key priorities for development and brings together the planning requirements of the education service. Together they set out a vision for education and its contribution to the economic, social and environmental development of the city.

29.   Following the city's establishment as a unitary authority a report on standards and quality in Derby schools was prepared. This served as the audit base for the first plan, and was updated a year later. While both reports provide useful overviews of strengths and weaknesses identified in inspection reports, and the second provides a summary of the LEA's actions in the intervening year, neither includes analysis of the needs and performance of schools in any detail and the second contains little evaluation of the impact of LEA activity. Their value as audits is therefore limited.

30.   The Education Development Plan has a number of weaknesses. The process for setting school targets, although dealt with at some length, is insufficiently precise and depends on the implementation of measures, such as developing a pupil level database, that are as yet incomplete. The steps to be taken when schools set insufficiently challenging targets are not set out clearly. It is not clear from the plan how the proposed activities will lead to the improvements indicated in the targets for GCSE. The process for dealing with schools causing concern does not include a set of detailed criteria for each of the various levels of priority, and does not set out the support available. The plan does not contain an analysis of the achievements of minority ethnic pupils, who constitute about 19 per cent of the total school population, though this is due in part to difficulties in collecting the relevant data. Key indicators for monitoring and evaluating the impact of some activities are imprecise: several which could be expressed quantitatively are not. This makes them less useful in evaluation than they might be.

31.   Nevertheless, it is an adequate plan based on the right priorities and, in the main part, the actions planned are appropriate. The strategy to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan is thorough. The LEA monitors its own performance and that of its schools in the context of its statistical neighbour authorities with whom it has frequent contact.

32.   Overall performance targets for 2002 are ambitious, particularly the target for English in Key Stage 2. Standards in both primary and secondary schools are improving year on year, although most schools will need to make considerable progress to achieve the overall 2002 target. Just over half the primary schools have achieved their 2000 target in English this year, while almost two-thirds have done so in mathematics. In secondary schools, half have attained their target for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades. Significant progress has been made in reducing the number of pupil exclusions towards what again is an ambitious target. The LEA has met its target of reducing exclusions by 50 per cent. This is a good start and the LEA is working hard to sustain the reduction.

33.   Both the original plan and the revision were widely circulated as drafts with invitations to comment. Many do not regard the plan as central to the educational developments of the authority, and have only an outline knowledge of its contents. In an attempt to ensure that the revised plan is more widely understood and accepted as the blueprint for the LEA's school improvement strategy, both it and a useful summary have recently been circulated widely, though school visits showed a wide range of response to this. A few schools have welcomed it and have already used it as a check for their own planning or to organise discussion with staff or governors. Most have so far done little more than acknowledge its arrival.

Allocation of resources to priorities

34.   Derby's performance in this area is unsatisfactory. The Council's expenditure has not reflected appropriately its stated priorities. It has made some progress in controlling high spending budgets which it inherited from Derbyshire, for example in social services and capital debt repayments. However, the Council has made too little progress in addressing the inherited low spending on education in line with its declared priority.

35.   The Council has failed to convince schools of its commitment to improve education funding; elected members often refer to the amount of money spent on education, rather than engaging in consultations with schools about its sufficiency to meet strategic objectives. Spending increases have tended to be incremental and have lacked strategic direction. The lack of an appropriately senior officer in the education department with a resource policy brief to assist in this is an impediment. However, elected members have recently agreed that £0.5 million will be available for growth in next year's budget although this commitment has not impacted upon schools' spending plans. Schools have not yet been fully engaged in discussing how this should be distributed.

36.   A lack of transparency about funding for schools compared to SSA led to relationships between the LEA and its schools becoming severely strained earlier in 2000. There is considerable residual suspicion in schools. As a result the Council has much work to do in re-establishing trust with its schools on funding issues. This position is not helped by the fact that the key strategic statement of the Council, the Best Value Performance Plan, makes no mention of improving resources in education as one of the ten priorities.

37.   At school level, the funding formula is too complex. While it targets money at need, the differentials in schools' funding are wider than found in many LEAs and there are no robust measures of the benefits accruing from these additional funds. Officers and members have recognised this, and consultation with headteachers brought about revisions to the formula this year, though there remains the need for a radical review.   A working group comprising headteachers and officers invested considerable time in developing a 'needs led' approach which headteachers were keen to pursue, but elected members did not allow this work to progress.   The director of finance is developing plans to reshape the budget setting mechanism to base decisions on targeting resources to identified priorities.

38.   There have also been some successes, including: meeting the Key Stage 1 class size pledge earlier than most LEAs and establishing a sound mechanism for building the future costs into schools' budgets; the building of two new primary schools and the planning of another; considerable investment in ICT equipment; and increasing the proportion of Key Stage 2 pupil funding in order to reduce the Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 funding differential.   The steps taken to remove surplus places is an important move towards enabling the LEA to make better use of resources.

39.   Although there is no explicit medium-term target for the annual level of capital expenditure, a range of funding sources, including the private finance initiative, is being explored, and the LEA has been successful in attracting major contributions from building developers.   The emergent corporate capital strategy for the Council and the asset management plan will together provide a sound basis to achieve the improvements to the school building stock which is rightly identified as a key priority in the Best Value Performance Plan.

Best Value preparations

40.   Derby made an early start in preparing for the Best Value process, it has received a positive report from its external auditors and the first review (of the payroll system) inspected received a positive report. However, there are some important shortcomings which point to an unsatisfactory position.

41.   The fact that no reviews have yet been completed in the education department points to the potential for slippage.   However, some pilot reviews have been completed, important lessons learned, and some improvements are evident in those services as a result. The Best Value unit has produced and updated a useful toolkit to guide service managers through their reviews.   Unfortunately there is little evidence that this or the equally useful guides to benchmarking and business planning are being used systematically in the education department.   The basis for a performance management system is available in the form of the achievement and development system for staff, but its use is not consistent or secure, nor is it linked to corporate performance targets.

42.   The Best Value Performance Plan is a concise, accessible and well-presented document, but it does not include all the relevant performance indicators or targets for improvement.   The Council operates a stated principle that wherever possible services will be provided in-house.   This is unhelpful in encouraging an appropriate

level of rigour in applying challenge and competition. The early draft of a corporate procurement strategy is unconvincing as a vehicle for increasing competition. Finally, schools have not been sufficiently engaged in debate about the implications for them and for the LEA of Best Value.

Recommendations

In order to improve LEA-school relationships and the funding mechanism for schools:

- establish clear responsibility in the education department senior management team for financial policy development and the oversight of financial strategy and control;

- make clear to all stakeholders what the medium-term targets for improvements to funding are, the strategy for achieving them, and what the mechanisms for consultation and reporting will be; and

- continue to review the schools' funding formula in line with emerging proposals to align funding more closely to needs and to key objectives.

In order to ensure that the Best Value initiative has a positive impact on its performance:

- apply the performance management system consistently across the education department;

- publish all improvement targets;

- clarify committee roles and establish a scrutiny function;

- apply the principles of challenge and competition rigorously; and

- engage schools more actively in applying Best Value principles.

SECTION 2 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

43.   While the EDP is the main instrument of school improvement, other LEA functions have a significant influence either through supporting or inhibiting schools' efforts to improve. In Derby functions that make a positive contribution include the support provided by financial and personnel services. The provision and support of the Council's accounting systems enable senior managers in schools to focus most of their time and attention on matters directly affecting school improvement. Initiatives to promote social inclusion and reduce exclusions have been effective in helping schools to ensure that fewer pupils are out of school. The class size pledge has been achieved in Key Stage 1. The special education needs support services also make an effective contribution. In addition, the rationalisation of places in the primary phase has enabled some primary schools, including some in the most disadvantaged areas, to develop additional facilities such as parents' rooms. School improvement also benefits from the effective procedures to combat racism and social exclusion. Functions that have not contributed to school improvement include the difficulties experienced in many schools of not having an education welfare officer for extended periods of time, and the below average funding delegated to schools.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

44.   The LEA's provision for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention is generally effective, although some aspects require further development. While the LEA has a clear view of its responsibilities in exercising these functions, the extent to which headteachers, teachers and governors understand the changes in the role of the LEA that have occurred in recent years is extremely variable. Although these matters were discussed in the early days of the LEA, and particularly in the training programmes preparing for target-setting, there is still a good deal of ambiguity and misunderstanding, and several schools continue to have expectations of the LEA that are part of an earlier culture. In particular, the meaning of 'challenge' is seen only to refer to the process of questioning the suitability of performance targets, rather than to broader matters of improving teaching and management. The deployment of advisers' time to schools does not always reflect the level of need, and schools are not always clear about whether they, or the LEA, pay for the service.

45.   Responsibility for these functions rests with the quality development division. Each school has a link adviser, who visits once each term as part of the annual review cycle (ARC). This, together with scrutiny of performance data, constitutes the main strategy for monitoring and challenge. Most schools value this link adviser contact. Each round of visits is planned with a common agenda, notified in advance to schools and built round a central theme or task that is chosen to present a challenge to the schools, prompting them to review certain aspects of their practice in preparation.   Recent aspects have included the school's arrangements for reporting and dealing with any racial incidents, and the strategies they use to monitor the quality of teaching. Until recently, ARC visits normally included an observation of some lessons, but this now occurs only if there is a particular reason for doing so.

46. Visits to schools during this inspection indicated some variation in the way different advisers conduct these visits. The head of the quality development division is working towards more consistency both by careful preparation for the visits and by joining them to monitor the work of link advisers. Reports to a common format are completed following each ARC visit, and in addition to their use in connection with individual schools these provide a valuable source from which the LEA can monitor the overall performance and needs of schools. While most reports are appropriately evaluative, a minority are descriptive only, recording the substance of discussion but providing little information to help identify areas where support is needed.

47. There are significant differences in the conduct of ARC visits between primary and secondary schools, and generally the process is more effective with the former than the latter. While all primary schools visited had received copies of reports written following the ARC visits, this was much more variable in secondary schools, and some headteachers said that they had received no record of any visits. It is not current practice to send copies of these reports to the chair of governors, although in primary schools at least it is increasingly common for the chair to be present for part of the ARC visit. This phase difference is reflected in responses to the school survey: most primary schools consider that the LEA has a reasonable knowledge of the school, while only a minority of secondary schools take this view.

48. In addition to regular visits, the link adviser is responsible for analysing the school's performance data and scrutinising inspection reports. An ARC file for each school is maintained centrally, and its contents are reviewed at a termly internal meeting to determine any need for intervention and additional support. While this strategy is effective in identifying schools for additional support, the lack of clear criteria for each of the four levels of priority means that there is inconsistency in the assessment of need. This is a further source of confusion for schools.

49. Link advisers also convene regular meetings of headteachers in the cluster groups of schools, and many convene network meetings for subject co-ordinators or teachers with common special responsibilities such as special educational needs co-ordinators and staff development co-ordinators. These make a significant contribution to school improvement and are valued by the teachers concerned.

50. A good professional development programme closely linked to the EDP priorities is an additional support to schools. School improvement networks and subject leader development networks for both primary and secondary schools provide an effective way of combining training courses, seminars and school-based consultancy. A recent user survey completed as part of a Best Value review of training and professional development in the education service produced a high rating of positive evaluations, and this was supported in discussions and school visits during the inspection. Very few courses are cancelled because of insufficient support. In addition, a range of guidance documents has been produced to help schools develop aspects of their work, such as the management of cultural diversity, school improvement planning and special educational needs. The range of experience and expertise of the LEA's advisers and officers, already wide for an authority of this size, is complemented by an arrangement with a neighbouring LEA to purchase the time of some of its specialist advisers to work in Derby. It is further extended by links with local universities and higher education colleges, the Industrial

Society and a range of consultants, some of whom are part-time members of the advisory service. This provision is a strength of the authority.

51. Leadership of the advisory service is effective. Advisers are deployed according to their strengths, and the Council's achievement and development scheme operates to provide quality assurance and performance review. This includes twice yearly review discussions with the head of the division, and observations of the conduct of ARC visits and other aspects of advisers' work. The strategic planning of the service has suffered because of the lack of departmental leadership.

52. The budget for the provision of these functions was just less than £700,000 in 1999-2000, of which income from school purchase of services accounted for one-fifth. The cost of school improvement activity in the current year is about £21 per pupil, a little less than the average for similar authorities. This represents satisfactory value for money.

Collection, analysis and support for use of data

53. The quality development division includes a research and data analysis unit with responsibility for analysing schools' performance data for use by both schools and the LEA. Good progress has been made in establishing a database of pupil-level data. The use of unique pupil numbers is already enabling some value added analysis of the progress made by pupils over a period of time, in addition to analyses of aggregated school achievements and trends over recent years. With the exception that the database does not include indicators of minority group membership, it is capable of supporting a wide range of analyses that are useful for LEA monitoring and planning. The unit also collates Key Stage 2 National Curriculum results and passes these to receiving secondary schools, a service which they value. To enhance further performance measurement, the LEA meets the costs of optional National Curriculum tests for primary schools and of administering cognitive attainment tests in secondary schools.

54. Each autumn, schools receive a detailed set of data about their own performance and that of other schools in the LEA. While a list of the benchmark groupings of schools is provided, the performance data is not organised in a format that helps schools to make relevant comparisons of their performance. Although a limited range of questions that schools can ask of the data is provided, there is no guidance about how to interpret its meaning or, more importantly, how it can be used as a base for setting targets and in the management of school improvement. Training courses to help with this have been provided, but many headteachers are critical of the lack of guidance, and few are making extensive use of the data provided. As a result the service is not providing good value. Further useful analysis is likely to be enabled by the use of the Derby assessment and recording toolkit which is being developed in liaison with another LEA, but this has not yet been implemented in more than a small minority of schools.

55. The process for setting performance targets is outlined in the EDP, although this is lacking in detail. Information packs used in training constitute the main guidance on target setting. Some headteachers are not clear about the difference

between a forecast and a target and there is a widespread uncertainty about what is a reasonable challenge. The autumn term ARC visit centres on a discussion of the school's proposed targets and the steps by which these have been determined. There has been wide variety of practice in the past, ranging from hardly any discussion about the targets to extensive questioning about how targets were to be achieved. Last year the LEA challenged the English targets of 21 primary schools by telephone, some time after the ARC visit and after the targets had been formally set by governors. Of these, 18 eventually revised their targets, some very reluctantly. This is not a sound approach to the negotiation of targets with schools. The fact that 15 out of the 18 schools exceeded their revised targets in the National Curriculum tests lends further support to the view that there is a fundamental weakness in the approach. As a result of this experience, changes have been introduced in the process to be used in the forthcoming round of ARC visits. The LEA did not challenge attainment targets in any of the secondary schools.

56.   Schools are encouraged to set targets for other age groups and in other aspects of their work than those required nationally, and many are doing so. Work is taking place to develop appropriate targets with special schools. However, the weaknesses in the support for target-setting was confirmed by the views of schools.

Support for literacy

57.   The quality of support for literacy is good overall. It is very good for primary schools. The service is well led and managed and primary schools in particular are appreciative of the quality of advice they receive.

58.   At Key Stage 1 pupils achieve standards comparable to the national average, with a slightly higher proportion achieving Level 3 in writing. Results in English tests at Key Stage 2 have improved steadily and are in line with those found in similar LEAs, though still below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 has improved in line with national averages. The LEA has set a very challenging target of 83 per cent of pupils gaining Level 4 by 2002. In 2000, 68 per cent of pupils reached this level, below the target of 71 per cent, though the rate of improvement was in line with the national average. While the LEA has much to do to attain its goal, support is being deployed effectively to ensure maximum progress. Results at Key Stages 3 and 4 are below national averages but in line with similar LEAs.

59.   The support is particularly well planned and effective in Key Stages 1 and 2. Almost all of the primary schools visited felt they had benefited from the wide range of support provided through action planning, demonstration lessons and in-service sessions for schools and parents. The LEA continues to provide a high level of support to schools, but it is in proportion to need and targeted at schools' individual weaknesses. Schools value opportunities to share good practice through meetings for co-ordinators and a network of schools offering specific strengths. Special schools have been well supported and have contributed to the implementation of the literacy strategy, for example by demonstrating the usefulness of the P levels in assessing the progress of lower attaining pupils in mainstream schools. However, the support for nursery schools has been limited. A range of strategies is being developed at Key Stage 3, including the use of summer schools, the recommended

framework for literacy at Key Stage 3, and detailed action planning. These do not yet add up to a coherent drive to raise standards across all schools, although they have the capacity to do so.

60.   Links with support for English as an additional language have improved and are now good, with appropriate training and guidance for support staff.

61.   The LEA has given good additional support for schools through a range of projects to encourage reading, for example training for Better Reading Partners, and the 'Reading is Fundamental' initiative which provides books for individual pupils. The literacy resource centre is well stocked and schools value guidance and advice on books and other resources to support teaching. Funding for the schools' library service, jointly run by Derby City and Derbyshire LEAs, has been delegated this year. Most primaries and almost half the secondary schools have bought the service, but in the schools visited there were reservations about the range of resources available for pupils beyond Key Stage 1.

Support for numeracy

62.   Support for numeracy is very good. The team is well led and schools rightly rate very highly the quality of leadership, guidance and advice provided by the numeracy adviser and the team.

63.   Standards at Key Stage 1 have improved in line with the LEA's neighbours and national averages. Standards at Key Stage 2 have risen from a low baseline and are now in line with the LEA's neighbours, although below the national average. In 2000, 67 per cent of pupils reached Level 4 or above and with sustained effort the LEA is well placed to meet its target of 75 per cent. Standards at Key Stage 3 are in line with the LEA's neighbours although slightly below those found nationally.

64.   The LEA has developed an effective strategy for supporting schools at Key Stages 1 and 2. The drive to raise standards of numeracy in primary schools was started a year earlier than the national launch. The mathematics adviser and numeracy consultants provide a very good range of support, well targeted to the needs of individual schools. Schools were particularly appreciative of demonstration lessons, of resources for teachers and pupils and support with action plans and target setting. The LEA has been prompt to develop a strategy for Key Stage 3. Nine summer schools were run in 2000, and all schools have been involved in planning for effective transition between Year 6 and 7. Secondary schools have begun to take on board the implications of the numeracy strategy for their teaching; leading mathematics teachers have been appointed for the secondary phase and resource packs are being provided for all Year 7 pupils. Other valuable support to schools includes a mathematics conference held in 2000 and breakfast clubs.

65.   Special schools have been effectively involved in the strategy, but there has been very little effective support for nursery schools.

Support for information and communication technology

66.   Support for developments in information and communication technology (ICT) was unsatisfactory in one-third of the schools visited where this issue was explored, and satisfactory in the remainder: in none was it good. With a small number of individual exceptions, inspection reports show that standards of attainment are low in both primary and secondary schools, and ICT is a key area needing improvement in most schools. Moreover, the ratio of computers to pupils is very low in comparison with the national average. In primary schools it is 1:30, compared with 1:13 nationally, and in secondary schools 1:14 compared with 1:4.

67.   The ICT development plan 2000-03 sets out an ambitious programme to remedy these deficiencies. It is a detailed and comprehensive plan, although some success criteria are insufficiently precise to support careful evaluation. The plan is based on an audit that schools prepared themselves. From the autumn term the LEA has taken a number of appropriate steps to improve its support to schools. These include the appointment of an additional adviser to work with a consultant to provide curriculum support to primary schools. Twenty primary schools have been identified on the basis of need as the first group for intensive support, and a realistic strategy for supporting them has been developed. All other primary schools are to get a smaller amount of support. Advisory support for secondary schools is purchased from a neighbouring LEA, and there are arrangements to use the expertise of some of the LEA's teachers. The staff development programme includes a good range of training provision at levels ranging from basic skills training to subject specific courses which include a consideration of the role of ICT in subject learning. Participation in courses by primary teachers is good, but the response from secondary schools is less so. However, in both phases regular network meetings for ICT coordinators are valued.

68.   The implementation of National Grid for Learning (NGfL) funded network installations is leading to significant improvement of provision in many schools, although there is a some way to go to bring standards up to national levels. All secondary schools have curriculum networks, and most have administrative networks, all with Internet access. About 40 per cent of primary schools also have networks. The LEA is on line to meet its NGfL target that all schools will have networked Internet access by 2003. In addition to the training provided by the quality development division, the take-up of New Opportunities Fund training by schools in Derby exceeds the national average. More than half the schools have nominated a provider.

69.   From a late and limited beginning, the LEA has recently intensified its support for ICT in schools at all levels, and while this injection of additional support has had little time to make an impact, there are many strong features of the strategy and the deployment of resources. Plans to support primary schools are sound, although those for secondary schools are less systematic. There is a good partnership between arrangements for technical support and curriculum support, which should avoid resources intended to support the curriculum being diverted into providing help for schools in technical matters.

Support for schools causing concern

70.   The LEA has satisfactory procedures in place to support schools causing concern.   Few Derby schools have been found to be a cause for concern. One school which was designated as requiring special measures in March 1998 closed in August 1999. One primary school became subject to special measures in the summer 2000. Two secondary schools have been designated by OFSTED as underachieving.

71.   In April 1997, or very soon afterwards, four schools had been declared by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses. This number has increased to seven. Of these, three have been visited by OFSTED and reported to have made satisfactory progress. The other schools have not yet been visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). In addition, the LEA has placed five schools in this category because of its own concerns.

72.   The LEA drew up a sound priority schools policy in its early days and has reviewed this annually. Schools the LEA has concerns about are placed in one of four categories. Those schools on Level 1 are experiencing temporary or short-term difficulties; Level 2 is for those schools with greater difficulties; Level 3 applies to schools with serious weaknesses and Level 4 is for those schools requiring special measures.   While the levels of categorisation are clear, the criteria for placing schools on one of the four levels are not sufficiently explicit and are not understood by schools. In addition, outlined procedures have not always been followed. For example, when schools have been placed on Levels 1 or 2 they have not been notified in writing, nor have governors always been kept sufficiently informed. In addition, schools may not have received written notification when they have been removed from the priority lists. These inconsistencies have been responsible for some confusion and ill-feeling in schools about how arrangements operate. These matters were resolved when the priority schools policy was reviewed recently: schools are now informed in writing when they are placed on, or removed from, the lists.

73.   In the past, the LEA has responded quickly to priority schools, but the strategies applied and the quality of the support have not always led to marked improvement. This has been so in dealing with weak management and in identifying weak schools early enough. The procedures are now more robust. In the main, the LEA identifies those schools at risk and supports them effectively. Where its own resources are insufficient, for example in providing subject or management support, the LEA brokers it from other LEAs and outside providers. In the schools where support has been received, it has been effective and has resulted in improvements.

74.   Reports on priority schools are submitted to the members' evaluation panel (a committee of cross-party representatives) which monitors their quality and progress.

Support for governors

75.   The quality of support provided to governing bodies presents a mixed picture. Training and information provision are satisfactory and often good.   However, governors are not routinely informed about the outcome of ARC visits or about

decisions to designate a school at a specific priority level. A small minority of governors is critical of poor responses to requests and questions addressed to the LEA, and there are also complaints that governors' views are not considered sufficiently or in some cases asked for when LEA decisions are made about matters concerning the school. These features make the overall provision of support for governors unsatisfactory.

76. The governors' training and information service is more highly valued by primary schools than secondary schools. Eighty-three per cent of primary schools subscribed in 2000 to the governors' support service level agreement, but only 36 per cent of secondaries. An extensive programme, amounting to 34 courses with almost 700 attendances, was organised in the last school year. In addition, in-house training for full governing bodies can be arranged on request. An induction course for newly appointed governors is attended by a significant number of governors. The programme is effectively monitored. In addition to end of course evaluations, regular meetings of link governors provide advice on future provision and offer further evaluation of courses. Termly newsletters and a yearly governor handbook and planner are valued. Termly area meetings are organised for chairs of governing bodies, and an annual conference is organised in conjunction with the Derby Association of Governing Bodies. Effective arrangements have been introduced recently to support governors in their responsibilities for performance management. The main criticisms voiced concerned the timing of some courses, lack of progression in courses dealing with specific topics, and meetings often being dominated by issues more relevant to primary schools.

77. The LEA's support for clerking is weak but developing. Schools employ their own clerks to governing bodies, since the LEA does not offer this service, although a sequential training programme is available including training leading to accreditation in conjunction with Derby University. In addition, termly briefing sessions are held for clerks, and there is a telephone helpline. The LEA estimates that about a third of clerks attend the briefing sessions. Officers are working hard to extend and reinforce its contact with individual governing bodies.

78. Almost a quarter of the LEA nominated places on governing bodies are currently vacant, in spite of recent decisions to recruit on a wider non-political basis than formerly. The result is that 13 per cent of all places on governing bodies are unfilled, considerably higher than the national average. The LEA treats this as a serious matter and has mounted several campaigns using both press and local radio in an attempt to persuade more people to undertake this work.

79. Headteachers are encouraged to invite the chair of governors to attend at least part of the ARC meetings and this is becoming increasingly common practice. However, it is an unacceptable oversight that the chair of governors does not receive directly a copy of the report prepared by the link adviser following each visit. In some cases the headteacher passes a copy to the chair, although there is no firm requirement on headteachers to do this. This arrangement is unsatisfactory as a way of assisting governors to evaluate the effectiveness of the school and the LEA's contribution to its improvement. In some instances, chairs of governors have had no official notification that the school has been designated a priority school, and understandably feel let down by this.

Support for management

80.   The LEA provides good support for school management in its primary schools. The quality of support for secondary schools is not so effective, but is improving.

81.   Evidence of recent school inspections indicates that the quality of management is satisfactory or better in four-fifths of the primary schools, and somewhat better than this in secondary schools. This is very close to the national picture. Among the aspects of management most commonly identified as needing further improvement are development planning and self-evaluation, particularly in monitoring the quality of teaching. One of the EDP priorities is the improvement of leadership, planning and teaching. Many of the activities through which this priority is to be achieved are concerned with promoting self-evaluation in schools, and the development of the ARC process emphasises using the outcomes of schools' own self-review processes as a main contribution to link adviser visits. These visits and other contacts with link advisers are the major component in the LEA's support for senior managers in schools.

82.   Termly cluster group meetings for headteachers, together with less frequent conferences, provide opportunities for headteachers to be informed and consulted about both local and national developments. The recent introduction of a series of lectures by nationally recognised figures in education is yet a further contribution by the LEA to the development of an education culture in the city. In addition, the quality development division continues to extend a series of useful guidance documents that covers topics such as school improvement planning, educating the most able pupils, and, in a paper currently in preparation, self-review and evaluation strategies. Although ARC visits no longer automatically include lesson observation, several headteachers have invited advisers to undertake joint observations with them to help develop lesson observation as part of their self-review arrangements.

83.   The fact that more than half its secondary schools are foundation schools that have for several years been used to considerable independence in management means that the LEA is having to explore the most effective and acceptable ways of supporting them. It is partly because this is not yet fully resolved that the ARC process is less systematic in secondary than in primary schools. Some secondary schools are not confident that the LEA has much to offer them, although recent developments suggest that this is likely to improve.

84.   A wide range of training and development provision forms the other key element of the LEA's management support and improvement strategy. Extensive use is made of national training programmes for senior managers, and the LEA is itself an accredited provider of both the Leadership and Management Programme for new headteachers (HEADLAMP) and OFSTED school self-evaluation training. Nearly all who have benefited from these training schemes are positive in their evaluation. To supplement the management expertise of its own officers and advisers, the LEA works in close partnership with local universities, neighbouring LEAs and independent training agencies. Provision is carefully evaluated, and the

analysis of both short- and longer-term evaluations is evident in planning new provision.

85.   Support at middle management level is variable. Subject leader networks for both primary and secondary schools are much valued and provide good quality training on management, planning and communication skills. All management development training now includes elements designed to promote an understanding of self-evaluation strategies.

86.   Direct support for newly appointed headteachers other than through Headlamp has been unsatisfactory, but has improved recently. When a school has either a newly appointed headteacher or an acting headteacher, it is automatically placed in Level 1 of the priority schools structure, so that extra support can be provided. Pending a national system of performance management, appraisal of headteachers does not operate consistently. Support for newly qualified teachers is imaginative and thorough and fully meets national requirements for the induction year.

Support for early years

87.   The LEA provides satisfactory support for early years.

88.   The LEA invests heavily in early years provision, and provides a part-time place in the maintained sector for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want one. However, the places are not equitably distributed across the city and some areas are better provided for than others. Pupil places at the city's eight nursery schools cost more than twice as much as places in nursery units attached to schools. The quality of provision in schools and units is good. While the contribution made by nursery schools to improving inclusion is strong, there are also examples of nursery units, particularly those in enhanced resource schools, providing well for pupils who have diverse needs. The LEA has recognised the need to review its strategy for and provision of nursery education.

89.   Improving achievement in the early years is one of the EDP priorities. The LEA seeks to achieve this by providing information and training for staff working in the foundation stage, providing training for recognised childcare providers and raising the profile and worth of early years education. In many ways, the LEA is succeeding in meeting its objectives: it is raising the profile of early years education, but its contribution to improvements in mainstream provision is less effective.

90.   The LEA has established an Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) with appropriate membership. The partnership is developing in its role and the contribution it makes to improvements in early years. The LEA's partners such as Umbrella, an information and campaigning organisation for children with special needs, and Home Start speak highly of its contribution to the work of the partnership. The support and training provided for those in the private and voluntary sector are valued highly. However, the attempt by the partnership and the LEA to provide joint training for all those involved in early years has alienated staff in the mainstream sectors. The training has been at an inappropriate level for experienced teachers and nursery nurses. Schools, with justification, are critical of the level of

support which they receive from the LEA and believe that its concentration on the EYDCP as the provider of training and support has diluted the quality and extent of the support. The training for the introduction of the foundation curriculum was particularly criticised by schools.

91. Sure Start began in November 1999 and is well established. The LEA was successful in acquiring 'trailblazing' status and is the accountable body for the programme which aims to improve the ability to learn, strengthen families and communities and improve the health, and social and emotional development of children. The LEA and its partners are developing successfully childcare services for families and children under four years in disadvantaged areas.

Recommendations

In order to improve monitoring, support, challenge and intervention:

- take further steps to ensure that schools understand the LEA's responsibilities to monitor and challenge schools, and to intervene in and support those that it considers are a cause for concern;

- ensure that the allocation of adviser visits to schools is demonstrably proportionate to their needs, and that schools are clear about the purpose and cost basis of all visits; and

- provide sharper definitions of the four levels of priority to ensure that headteachers and governors understand how a level, if any, applies to their school, and the bases on which decisions are reached about the kinds of additional support to be provided.

In order to improve the usability of data by schools:

- work with headteachers to examine the range and format of the data provided for schools and ensure that it is made available in the best format to encourage and facilitate its use;

- provide clear guidance to ensure that headteachers and others understand how to interpret the data and how it can be used in the management of school improvement; and

- improve target-setting by providing clearer guidance on how schools can determine a suitable degree of challenge.

In order to improve the support to governors, and to enable them to carry out their roles more effectively:

- take steps to ensure that governors are fully consulted about all strategic decisions that affect their schools;

- ensure that chairs of governing bodies receive any documents, including reports following ARC visits, that are likely to assist them in discharging their responsibilities for standards and quality in the school; and

- in the absence of a centrally-provided clerking service, continue to explore ways of improving the direct contact between the LEA and governors and extend this to more schools.

In order to make better use of resources and the high quality of provision for nursery pupils:

- clarify the strategy for and role of the different nursery education providers;

- review the quality and value for money of nursery provision across the different sectors; and

- ensure that training meets the needs of all early years staff.

SECTION 3 – STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

92.   Derby City Council states a very strong commitment to lifelong learning in its mission statement: 'Education is fundamental to everyone's quality of life. The city will promote lifelong learning to achieve: excellence; personal development; integration into working life and society; active citizenship; and adaptability to economic and social change.'

93.   Progress in meeting the plans set out by the new LEA faltered because of the lack of leadership that resulted from its unfortunate start. This left the LEA without clear leadership and led to high levels of distrust in schools about the Council's commitment to education.

94.   Difficulties resulted from the poor communications between the LEA and its schools and poor consultation mechanisms. The resulting mistrust of the LEA by schools has engendered ill feelings which are getting in the way of developments, for example between community and foundation schools, and between the mainstream and nursery sectors. Additionally, schools have high expectations of what the LEA should provide. In some cases, however, schools' expectations are unrealistically high because the LEA has not done enough to help them understand its changing role. Much needed and more effective systems of communications between the department and schools are now beginning.

95.   However, schools felt well served by many individual members of the department who, despite being without a leader, continued to deliver services which supported schools. Those individuals, mainly from the department's middle management, continue to provide effective support. This augurs well for the future of this LEA which has now the leadership and vision it previously lacked.

96.   The current director has been in post only since June 2000, but already there are signs of a department which is beginning to make up lost ground, both in terms of progressing on the EDP priorities and in establishing a closer working relationship with schools. The first expressed priority is for the LEA and its schools to sign up to a common agenda.   There is a new, and openly expressed, will within the department to work with and for schools in order to make Derby a 'city of learning'. Strenuous efforts are now rightly being made by officers and members to create transparent communications, consultation and decision-making procedures.

97.   Schools are displaying optimism, albeit still guarded, about the way in which the department is communicating more openly and seeming to want a closer working relationship with them. Many schools still dwell on the LEA's history. They must now put this behind them and establish a true working partnership with the LEA. The draft education service development plan, the second in the LEA's history, provides an overall focus for the department's work. The plan is at an early draft stage because of the need for the new director to assess accurately the priorities for, and current position of, the department's work. It captures the key priorities and brings together the planning requirements of the education service as a whole. It takes account of the major legal, regulatory and structural demands placed on LEAs. The

plan is the subject for much further work in order to make it a valuable aid to development.

98.   Although the draft education service plan is set firmly in the context of the Council's wider services and aims, the lack of a strategic plan impedes imparting a shared vision for the LEA and of how it intends to develop its role and services.

99.   The lack of a corporate plan impedes developments in corporate working. All executive members and chief officers meet together fortnightly as the management group which has been established to facilitate more corporate working and to ensure that members and officers are better informed about work across the departments of the Council.   While these meetings are successful in improving corporate understanding, they do not compensate for the lack of a corporate plan.

100.   The executive member for lifelong learning took over responsibility in May 2000 after his predecessor retired from public life.   The responsibilities of this member are many: schools, including repairs and maintenance, centrally funded school services, including special needs; youth service; adult education; mandatory and discretionary awards; access support, including ethnic minority achievement grant; health and fitness; community centres and council activity centres.   It is doubtful if any one person is able to carry out effectively the full range of tasks assigned to the role.

101.   The members' evaluation panel monitors the performance of all schools and the progress of priority schools.   The intention is that members of the advisory committees become well informed and influence decision-making at policy committee level. While this is an admirable intention, there is too little opportunity for open debate in committee. This is unfortunate when a system has been established to enable decisions to be made from an informed basis. An education committee has been retained in order to provide a platform for members across the parties, the diocesan representatives and the LEA's partners to be kept informed of, and consulted about, developments.

102.   The decision-making process of the Council is unclear. While some decisions can be, and are, made by chief officers, others are made by the full Council. The facility has been retained for policy committee to take urgent decisions which cannot wait for Council.

103.   While Council members receive sound advice and adequate information of an appropriate quality, they are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the work of the education department or its schools and the outcomes of decisions. The decision not to make an early temporary or permanent appointment of director resulted in the Council losing the confidence of its schools and losing ground in some educational developments. Members regard the outcomes of the school survey which indicated schools' discontent with the Council's strategic management of education as a result of unfortunate timing. This is not the case. Many schools still feel let down by the Council, and while ready to work in partnership question whether this is reciprocal.

104.   The education department has benefited from the City's strong commitment to working closely with its partners and has built confidently on this.   It has good

working relationships with many partners whose work contributes to the education service. Notably effective partnerships exist with: the University of Derby, which has collaborated with the LEA to support the professional development of teachers, to host summer schools and to investigate and improve recruitment of male and minority ethnic teachers; diocesan bodies; colleges of further education; the Southern Derbyshire Health Authority in encouraging health promoting schools; the Southern Derbyshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team, the Derby City of Learning Partnership, Sport England, and various other organisations which support lifelong learning. However, links with Derbyshire Careers Services are not as fully developed as they might be and the potential of the service is not sufficiently exploited.

105. An Education Action Zone comprising 23 schools has been established successfully in the north east of the city, an area which comprises three distinct geographical districts. The LEA's early work in establishing the zone and its subsequent work in partnership with the EAZ is beginning to show signs of how each is able to contribute to improvements. Good links have been set up with private sector partners and public organisations which are effectively supporting developments. The aims of the zone are to combat disaffection, to increase access to employment and training, to increase participation in further and higher education, to promote a community identity and to promote and stimulate communication within the zone. In many ways, the aims rightly correspond to those being pursued by the LEA.

Management services

106. In general, these services perform well; some very well. They are well managed by officers in middle management positions, and provide schools with a sound infrastructure of administrative and management support at reasonable cost. The LEA delegated these services later than most and, although well consulted upon and very clear, the service level agreements this year reached schools too late for them to make informed choices. One innovative move, however, was to include descriptors of service levels and standards for all non-traded services in the same booklet for schools. The booklet circulated recently to schools contains modified service packages informed by school feedback and headteacher liaison groups. Schools have become very aware of the market place during the year, have developed their own views of value for money in the absence of LEA guidance, and consequently will be much more critical purchasers. Having openly offered schools some packages containing services they may not want, the LEA is aware that it will need to offer more flexible and attractive packages this year. Service managers are also having to learn rapidly the disciplines of the market and are generally thriving, although a lack of clear leadership has meant that development and product planning has not been promoted consistently.

Financial services

107. Non-statutory financial services are offered through service level agreements with the education finance section. Sensible plans are in hand to vary the packaging for next year to recognise schools' differing needs, and to offer support including

courses, further benchmarking material and three year budget profiling advice to improve headteachers' and governors' financial planning capabilities.

108.   School accounts are reconciled electronically, and schools report very good support from the helpline if the Council's accounting system for doing so malfunctions.   This enables school support officers to make good use of their financial skills when they are in schools.   There is also some useful development work going on to develop the system to generate bespoke reports for individual schools. As a result, school budgets are in good shape with minimal deficits in both number and scale; all of which are known and have agreed recovery plans. Balances are not excessive, and governors are required to provide a rationale if budgets rise above a set limit. Schools rightly value the service, particularly those which have been supported through either a staffing or financial crisis.   Sound budgetary monitoring and control are also strengths across the education department.

Personnel services

109.   The performance of personnel services varies considerably.   Support for casework is very good and rightly valued by schools.   Plans to further improve documentation and to help schools deal with staff absence are well developed. Corporate personnel went through a Best Value pilot review and the outcome of this has been used by the education personnel service manager to improve the administrative processes which were criticised by schools.   Some improvements have been effected, but there remains a significant problem with the payroll service. This is unsatisfactory, and schools waste much time rectifying errors.

Administrative ICT

110.   Support for administrative ICT is satisfactory and improving.   Administrative systems are dealt with in the ICT strategic development plan as being integrated with other ICT developments and the concept of the school 'office as part of the school' is a useful perspective. Schools agree that the plans are sensible, but implementation has not always been successful. Schools can choose from three service levels, but there is more scope for disaggregating the packages.   A sensible range of approaches has been taken to offer schools technical support.   This includes helplines and visits and there are plans to appoint peripatetic technicians and an external contractor.

111.   The LEA's range of administrative and management packages are working well. However, the Derby assessment and recording toolkit system for tracking pupil performance is in its infancy. The recruitment of a local headteacher who is making good use of the system to offer training is a sensible move.   However, some headteachers felt that training has been provided so far in advance of their having kit installed that they could not practice and develop their skills.   The piloting of the individual pupil-based school census next year involving schools with staff of differing technical capabilities is a sensible move and part of the LEA's move to reducing bureaucracy. Although electronic transfer of data is not widespread, some evidence was found of it being used to improve efficiency.

Asset management planning and property services

112. In most technical aspects of this work, Derby performs at least satisfactorily, but it has failed to treat schools as partners and in most aspects of customer care it has performed poorly. There have been recent improvements, but there is much ground to make up.

113. Derby inherited a poor building stock from the county and it did not have a strategic approach to addressing the considerable backlog of work, which currently is estimated at around £18 million. There is now a corporate capital strategy but this does not include details of the amount or sources of funding to implement the strategy. Soon after inception, the education department and the commercial services section of the Council began to set up a condition database, build two new schools, generate considerable funds from building developers, and erect classrooms to meet the Key Stage 1 class size pledge. On the negative side, schools were poorly informed about priorities, they were not as fully involved in project development as they should have been, and they have a very low opinion of the quality of some of the work carried out. The school survey rated all aspects of property support as less than satisfactory, although school visits demonstrated a healthier situation and some headteachers confirmed that the delegation of funds is improving customer relations.

114. More recently, the asset management plan has been drawn up, school condition surveys have been completed on time, the suitability surveys are almost complete and seminars for stakeholders have taken place. A good feature of the asset management plan is the contribution made by headteachers with whom the LEA is now beginning to work in partnership. Schools have also had the opportunity of suggesting their priorities for consideration in the overall priority assessment. There is no mechanism for establishing which priorities schools could take on given their increasing amounts of capital funds. The commercial services manager has identified the need to improve the dialogue with schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve the corporate working of the Council, to enable it to work towards achieving its priorities and to improve communication:

- produce a corporate plan.

In order to ensure that the Council's decision-making processes are clearly understood:

- review, clarify and define the decision-making processes.

In order to improve efficiency:

- undertake an examination of the mechanism of data collection and input for payroll.

In order to maximise the management potential of ICT systems:

- provide training for headteachers to raise their awareness of and skills in the use of ICT applications.

In order to provide benchmarks for service managers and schools:

- make available to schools more information on alternative suppliers of services.

In order to improve the value of the strategic capital plan:

- include a statement of sources and amounts of funds.

In order to ensure effective convergence of the LEA's and schools' asset management plans:

- target resources at improving the dialogue between LEA and schools.

SECTION 4 - SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Strategy

115. The LEA does not have an overall strategy for the development of its provision for special educational needs (SEN). There have been initiatives to develop the quality of SEN services and their match to the requirements of the LEA, but these have taken place without the support of a coherent framework of development. As a result of the lack of an agreed vision for the future of special needs provision, there have been problems in moving forward. For example, a major and desirable initiative to give primary headteachers increased control of SEN resources was poorly managed by the LEA and poorly received by schools. As a result it failed. The widely agreed need for a move from all-age to age-phased provision in some special schools has long gone unresolved. Admission arrangements to some special schools and enhanced resource mainstream schools are problematic, and have led to considerable discontent amongst some schools. A recent attempt by the LEA to devolve the funding of learning support assistants, known in Derby as education care officers, to secondary schools was seriously hampered because matters had not been considered sufficiently and schools had not been consulted early enough in the process. The issue remains unresolved.

116. Officers have prepared belatedly a set of appropriate questions to be addressed in a future wide-ranging review of SEN. The practical means of implementation are undecided and the timescale of the necessary review remain unclear.

117. The LEA has made an effort to reduce the number of disaffected and disruptive pupils who were not being educated in school. However, it has insufficient provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural needs. As a result, there has been pressure on special and enhanced resource schools to take pupils with various degrees and manifestations of emotional and behavioural disabilities. This has not always been well managed, and there have been inappropriate placements. The situation has led to considerable anxiety and dissatisfaction amongst the schools affected by such placements. The issue remains unresolved.

118. The LEA has, however, taken steps to address a number of inappropriate patterns of provision which were inherited at the time of local government re-organisation, and to enhance the quality of a number of SEN services. For example, the rationalisation of 11 separate pupil support services into a unified SEN support service with a suitable management structure was planned and implemented successfully. The SEN support service has been well managed since its re-organisation, so that service planning, and the review and further modification of its structure, have been effective. The LEA has created additional posts within the educational psychology service in order to enable the service to make a contribution beyond the statutory minimum required of the service. This has increased the contribution of the educational psychology service to both individual pupil support and to school improvement.

119. A recent strategy has focused additional funding and specialist support on pupils with SEN early in their school careers, at stage 3 of the code of practice, so as

to reduce the likelihood of their needing more extensive support later on as their problems intensify. This 'pump-priming' strategy has the further long-term aim of reducing demand for the issue of statements. As the statementing process is costly and diverts funds from pupils toward bureaucracy, and current demand for statements is too high, this is an appropriate development. At this early stage, the scheme shows promise and appears to have been well accepted by schools, but schools' use of the additional funding and their commitment to reducing the demand for statements will require careful monitoring.

120.   There is no agreed definition within the LEA of the nature of inclusion or of the extent to which the LEA should pursue the process. The LEA's SEN policy has been redrafted recently with an increased focus on inclusion. There is no comprehensive action plan to promote inclusion, but many of the LEA's recent developments in the SEN field are in line with its intentions. The LEA has a range of strategies to enhance the quality of special educational provision for pupils within mainstream settings, including the development of the skills of special needs co-ordinators in mainstream schools and of training of education care officers. It has increased the range of enhanced resource schools and provision in special schools to provide education within the LEA rather than outside it for pupils with language difficulties and autism. The city's nursery schools and classes provide well for young children with disabilities, complemented by an increase in the focus of the SEN support service upon very young children. The scheme to increase support at stage 3 is well placed to enhance the inclusion of pupils of all ages with SEN.

Statutory duties

121.   The LEA meets the statutory requirements with regard to special educational provision. Particular attention has been paid to the production of statements of educational need within statutory time limits: 87 per cent are produced currently within the recommended time-scale. As a result, performance has improved dramatically from a very low baseline. Statements are now produced in a timely fashion, and the increased use of information technology is improving efficiency further. The LEA has good strategies to support parents in taking part in the consultation process, while strong links with medical officers and social services minimise delays in their provision of advice. Monitoring of LEA performance in the process is becoming a strength of the administrative service. Statements are generally informative and provide a good basis for schools' initial planning to meet needs.

122.   Annual reviews of statements are carried out as required, but the format adopted for the annual review of statements has a weakness, that is it relies on objectives in the statement, which are in fact often long-term aims, as the basis for review, rather than setting clear and measurable targets for the pupil for the year. As a result, annual reviews do not trace rates of progress effectively.

123.   The LEA attends a reasonable proportion of annual reviews, prioritising its attendance appropriately. Transition reviews for pupils at age 14+ are always attended. Particular attention is paid to the transition between all key stages of education of pupils with statements.

124.   A suitable range of booklets related to SEN issues is produced for parents, but there is a concern amongst enhanced resource schools and special schools that parents' choices with respect to the possible placements for their children are not always well informed.

School improvement

125.   The LEA demonstrates a good range and quality of activities designed to contribute to the improvement of schools' capabilities with special educational provision. The SEN adviser plans and co-ordinates a good variety of training and networking activities for such groups as special educational needs co-ordinators in mainstream schools and literacy and numeracy co-ordinators in special schools and leads valuable initiatives such as the publication of high quality supportive materials for the assessment of pupils with SEN, in addition to directly supporting the development of the quality of provision in special schools through the link adviser role.   There has been a particular focus on developing schools' capabilities in working with pupils with SEN in the literacy and numeracy strategies.   The educational psychology service is active in the support of school improvement, for example providing training courses and contributing to a comprehensive resource pack for special educational needs co-ordinators.   The SEN support service is increasingly working in schools through the development of teachers' capabilities and confidence, rather than working solely with individual pupils.   The LEA's promotion of the training of education care officers supports school improvement well.

Value for money

126.   Spending on special educational provision is higher than in similar LEAs. The LEA has not yet set out plans and programmes for special educational provision which embody best value principles. The special schools within the LEA provide a good quality of education at reasonable cost. The needs of young children with special educational needs are well met through the LEA's extensive nursery provision.   The investment in additional educational psychology posts is proving successful in enhancing the capabilities of some schools to manage special educational provision, which will reduce demand for specialised external services. However, the rationale for deploying educational psychologists is not sufficiently understood by schools. The re-organisation of the SEN support service has made it more efficient, and good management is further refining its efficiency and effectiveness. A pilot scheme providing for the electronic exchange of SEN data between schools and the LEA is proving very cost-effective. Overall, although costs are above the national average for SEN the LEA's support is well focused and provides satisfactory value for money.

127.   The LEA is redefining the roles of a small team of SEN moderators so as to make them responsible for monitoring schools' use of SEN funding.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that the future of special educational needs provision is planned effectively to meet the needs of pupils:

- define clearly the overall strategy for the development of provision for special educational needs;
- make explicit the definition of 'inclusion' as it relates to pupils with special educational needs;
- make clearer the rationale for deploying resources;
- monitor more closely the provision for pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure that pupils' needs are met appropriately; and
- consult schools fully about proposals in order that they may consider these and inform the debate about future provision.

SECTION 5 - ACCESS

Admissions

128.   Admissions are dealt with efficiently and cost effectively in a very difficult context. The external auditor recognised this success and offered further pointers to improvement which are being acted on. With the large number of admissions authorities in the city, constituting and operating an admissions forum has been a key achievement. The working groups of the forum are making steady progress in converging some of the disparate administrative arrangements which have evolved. As a result, appeals are now being dealt with more rapidly and the plan, already well advanced is for all appeals to be dealt with by March, ahead of many LEAs. It is not possible to gauge Derby's performance against other LEAs in terms of the percentage of parents who get their first choice, owing to the fact that the city technology college, foundation and aided schools do not share this data.

129.   The information for parents is attractive and accessible to all including those for whom English is not their first language. However, the criteria for prioritising admissions to community schools are not clear, and the criteria for aided and foundation schools, although not the responsibility of the LEA, are too varied. The timing of admissions to primary schools is left to governors 'taking into account the LEA's view on good practice in early years education'. Unfortunately there does not appear to be agreement within the LEA as to what this means. Rightly, the forum has this on the agenda for a working group to address.

School places

130.   Derby City is performing satisfactorily in this function and there are recent signs of improvement. Expenditure is very low compared to similar LEAs and the service offers sound value for money.

131.   The latest figures from the DfEE show the net surplus places to be one per cent in primary and 14 per cent in secondary. Five per cent of primary and two per cent of secondary schools have more than 25 per cent surplus places.

132.   The external auditor has been generally complimentary about Derby's performance and there is evidence to show good progress on the key recommendations.   Sufficiency of places at primary level is being addressed; two new schools have been opened since inception and a third is due to open in September 2001. Plans to remove around one thousand secondary places have been taken forward rapidly by the new director and proposals to close a secondary school have been published, with clear support from elected members.

133.   The school organisation plan is well presented and illustrates the major issues although it does not deal with aspects such as the future of nursery or special schools where policy is not clear, or the effects of the inclusion strategy. The school organisation committee is established and has dealt effectively, albeit with relatively minor issues. Officers are preparing the members of the committee for their role in the forthcoming school closure procedure. Improvements in data collection and analysis have been implemented and the work on benchmarking against surplus

places in other LEAs follows best value principle. Unfortunately data are not routinely shared with headteachers.

Promoting social inclusion

134. The LEA's strong commitment to social inclusion is well supported in schools. Support for ethnic minority pupils and the provision for early years education make an effective contribution to promoting social inclusion. The substantial reduction in exclusions since 1999, together with generally effective behaviour support for most pupils, have also improved social inclusion. The poor support for attendance together with a lack of sufficient, prompt and expert support for a small number of very challenging pupils partially undermines the LEA's effectiveness in avoiding social exclusion.

135. The LEA has a satisfactory range of measures in place to combat racism and has imaginative plans to develop pupils' cultural understanding. A conference was held to inform all head teachers of the implications of the *Report into the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence* (Macpherson Report 1999). Guidance on reporting racist incidents has been reviewed and updated. Schools are well aware of the LEA's expectations and link advisers have monitored schools' procedures for reporting racist incidents.

136. Very good guidance has been provided for schools on managing cultural diversity linked to the LEA's strategy for promoting citizenship.

Support for pupils educated otherwise than at school

137. Support for pupils out of school is satisfactory, with some strengths but some areas of weakness. The LEA is strongly committed to reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools and is reviewing provision for some groups of pupils who have in the past been educated separately, for example, pregnant schoolgirls and pupils with very poor attendance. The LEA is moving towards reintegrating these pupils into school wherever possible and otherwise providing for them in out of school centres. The need for home tuition has been substantially reduced.

138. Admissions and exclusions are monitored carefully. Schools have guidance on procedures for removing pupils from school rolls. Before September 2000 the variation in the length of time that pupils were out of school or awaiting placement was too great. This year the LEA has significantly improved the speed of reintegration or the start of alternative tuition.

139. The LEA has a range of provision for pupils educated off-site, both for pupils who are excluded from school and those pupils judged to be in danger of exclusion, who attend out of school centres on a part-time short-term basis. There is separate provision for each key stage. All the sites are collectively registered as a pupil referral unit. The LEA has increased the amount of tuition available, particularly for pupils in Key Stage 4. It is not yet full time but for most pupils amounts to at least 12 hours per week, and more than this for most pupils at Key Stage 4.

140.   The units provide programmes which are differentiated according to the pupils' levels of maturity and need. The Key Stage 1 programme provides year-long, part-time support through attendance at nurture groups. The main concern for schools was difficulty in accessing support. The Key Stage 2 unit focuses on short-term programmes of behaviour support designed to help pupils cope better in school though there is some provision for permanently excluded pupils. The support is less effective in helping schools to cater for those pupils who are the most difficult to manage. This is because it is hard for schools to access support and also because the programmes are too short to have a lasting effect for these pupils. Schools are not confident that the provision for some permanently excluded pupils is sufficient, either to help them cope in a new school or to provide for them offsite. Some individually negotiated plans have been successful in supporting pupils and avoiding exclusion but the LEA accepts that more needs to be done to improve support.

141.   The LEA's strategy at Key Stages 3 and 4 is more effective in meeting needs. There is a better partnership with most secondary schools which ensures that excluded pupils are placed appropriately and that an excessive burden does not fall on a small number of schools. In one school an inclusion unit has been set up with support from the SEN support service, which has taken some pupils excluded from other schools. This is extending the range of provision at Key Stage 3, where off-site support is provided on a part-time, short-term basis.

142.   At Key Stage 4 in particular, in partnership with several charitable trusts the LEA is developing a good range of provision for pupils who are excluded or who benefit from programmes which include vocational placements. All pupils educated off-site are encouraged to take courses which lead to accreditation, though few take GCSE or GNVQ courses. The LEA is well placed to develop full-time programmes for pupils in Key Stage 4 by 2002.

143.   The LEA monitors satisfactorily those pupils educated at home. All receive visits from the advisory service and the education welfare service. Where pupils have statements of special educational need, the special services support section monitors their education through the annual statutory review.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

144.   One of the EDP activities is to improve the support offered to very able pupils. This has resulted in this particular aspect of the LEA's work receiving rightful prominence.

145.   The policy for identifying and supporting gifted and talented pupils is helpful and usable. It defines the criteria for high achieving, able, exceptionally able and talented children and illustrates how schools might identify such pupils. Guidance for schools is clear and their responsibilities are outlined succinctly. The LEA is working in partnership with a target group of schools to produce further guidance. Training has been provided for schools in order to disseminate the policy and strategies for supporting the most able pupils. Working parties have been established to adapt the national literacy and numeracy strategies to meet the needs of Derby's gifted and talented pupils.

146.   Summer schools for gifted and talented pupils were hosted this year by the LEA in conjunction with the University of Derby and the education action zone. These two-week events were attended by 87 pupils.   The evaluations by the pupils indicated that their experiences had been positive.

Support for attendance

147.   Attendance in Derby's primary and secondary schools is in line with national averages.   Over the last five years attendance has been stable in primary schools and has improved slightly in secondary schools.   Levels of unauthorised absence are also in line with national averages.

148.   Nonetheless support for improving attendance and dealing with absence has been inadequate, largely because of high levels of absence through illness of education welfare offices, which have often resulted in poor and fragmentary support.   Although some activities have been undertaken in schools resulting in improved levels of attendance, the support has not been systematic or sustained. The newly appointed education officer for social inclusion, who now has responsibility for the education welfare service, has begun to address the long-standing problems and has a clear strategy for improvement.   Consultations have begun with headteachers about the role of the service and a draft attendance policy has been drawn up.   Schools are cautiously optimistic about the new leadership but the service has yet to regain the confidence of schools.

149.   The number of education welfare officers has been increased slightly.   Some have begun to renegotiate levels of service with schools, but the rationale for allocating support needs reviewing and clarifying.   There is no effective policy for the use of prosecution and the LEA has undertaken very few prosecutions.   The head of service has undertaken a review of procedures in order to improve the efficiency of the system.   Named education welfare officers have responsibility for monitoring children in employment and the attendance of children in public care, although the latter has not yet begun.

150.   The service has undertaken some activities which have improved attendance in individual schools, for example identifying all pupils with weaker attendance, informing their parents, and monitoring attendance closely over the following half term with appropriate rewards and sanctions.

Support for behaviour

151.   The LEA significantly reduced levels of permanent exclusion in 1999-00. Behaviour support is effective in secondary schools.   The support for primary schools is effective for most pupils but strategies to support a small number of very challenging pupils are inadequate in preventing exclusions.

152.   OFSTED inspections of both primary and secondary schools show the quality of schools' climates have improved since the first inspection at a faster rate than in similar LEAs and in LEAs nationally.   The number of schools judged to be good or very good is almost in line with the national average and the number requiring some

improvement has fallen. In both cycles the climate of secondary schools was slightly below that in similar LEAs.

153. Until recently the LEA had a very high rate of permanent exclusions. Few of the pupils excluded were on the code of practice for special needs. In 1999-2000, the LEA reduced permanent exclusions from 120 per year to 43. Almost all pupils excluded are now on the code of practice, most at stage 3 or above. The LEA monitors permanent and fixed-term exclusions very thoroughly. There is a clear policy guiding exclusion procedures and most schools valued the advice given to heads and governing bodies. The LEA has worked effectively with a small number of high-excluding schools to change policy and practice. The education welfare service has provided support and advocacy for parents who appealed against exclusion.

154. The behaviour support plan is appropriate. Developments have taken place in the delivery of support for behaviour since it was drawn up. Funds for behaviour support were delegated to secondary schools in 2000. Most choose to buy support back from the LEA and feel that, together with resources available through the pupil retention grant, support for behaviour is successful in enabling them to meet the needs of most pupils.

155. Funding for primary schools is managed by the LEA. Schools felt that behaviour support, provided by a variety of means, was effective in meeting the needs of most pupils. Schools which had support teachers and education care officers allocated for behaviour valued their advice and support for individual pupils. However, concern was expressed by primary schools which had small numbers of very challenging pupils about the level of support available for these pupils and the difficulty of accessing sufficient expert support early enough. Some headteachers felt that support was available only when they were on the point of excluding pupils.

156. Educational psychologists have provided valuable advice in some schools on managing behaviour. They are also leading a project working with a group of Year 6 pupils identified by schools as being in danger of exclusion to support them through transfer; evidence from last year and the current term indicate that this is helping to avoid exclusions: none of the pupils had been permanently excluded.

Support for children in public care

157. There are 234 children of compulsory school age in public care who are educated in city schools. Although the LEA has, in co-operation with the social services department, a strong commitment to support children in public care, to improve their performance and reduce the currently high level of permanent exclusions, the strategy is only now beginning to be implemented.

158. Good preparatory studies have been undertaken with other LEAs to identify issues and good practice. The LEA has just gained funding from the National Children's Bureau and appointed an adviser to take responsibility for children in public care. Appropriate committees exist within the LEA and the Council to monitor the effectiveness of the project. Some funding from the pupil retention grant has been used to report on the performance of children in public care who are educated

otherwise than at school as part of the strategy for establishing a baseline of performance and identifying pupils' needs.

159. The LEA has not yet provided schools with a list of children in public care which could act as the basis for monitoring and target setting. The LEA has undertaken a preliminary survey through the ARC reviews and all schools have a named teacher. It is unsatisfactory that the attendance of children in public care is not monitored by the education welfare service and that no training has taken place for teachers.

Support for minority ethnic pupils including Travellers

160. Support for minority ethnic pupils is good. The recently appointed head of service is providing good leadership and schools benefit from a well-deployed and increasingly well-trained team of instructors and bilingual support assistants. Most schools felt that the service had substantially improved.

161. Derby has a substantial population of Pakistani heritage and smaller numbers from other ethnic backgrounds including Japanese pupils and Bosnian refugees. Pupils from many heritage groups achieve standards appropriate to their individual abilities. The LEA is rightly concerned to improve the performance of Pakistani, African Caribbean and Bosnian Traveller pupils. The performance of Pakistani pupils in Key Stage 2 tests improved significantly between 1998 and 1999, particularly in mathematics, where the proportions achieving Level 4 rose from 41 per cent to 58 per cent, though it was still below the LEA average. African Caribbean boys achieve lower standards than the average for the LEA from Key Stage 2 onwards.

162. Target setting for cohorts of pupils has been limited in scope and is not yet based on the performance of individual pupils. However, schools are now being encouraged to set precise targets for specific groups. The LEA has introduced monitoring systems and targets to seek to ensure that pupils who are not fluent in English make appropriate progress.

163. The service has a clear plan and targets for its work. There is an equitable rationale for support and schools reported that the quality of support for pupils was generally good, though insufficient in quantity to meet the needs of Bosnian Traveller refugees. The LEA provides some support for African Caribbean pupils at the primary stage and has plans to put support in place for secondary pupils. Training has been provided for teachers and bilingual support assistants on the literacy and numeracy strategies. Increasing numbers of mainstream teachers are attending courses, for example on teaching newly arrived pupils.

164. Support for Travellers is provided by a joint service for Derby City and Derbyshire. Eighty-one pupils currently are supported by the service in Derby City schools. Schools with Traveller pupils visited during the inspection of the LEA valued the support provided. A recent survey by OFSTED found that the support for Traveller pupils was satisfactory with a strength in the support provided by the Traveller service for individual pupils and their families. The survey indicated a need for a more complete list of Traveller pupils in the city, including those not currently

registered in school. The service does not yet focus sufficiently on helping schools and teachers develop strategies to meet the needs of Traveller pupils. The data available on the performance of Traveller pupils is limited to those pupils who take national tests and public examinations rather than on the cohort of pupils and is an insufficient basis on which to set targets for improvement.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

165. The support for health and safety, for welfare and child protection are good and valued by schools.

166. The LEA has procedures in place for emergency planning and to tackle health and safety issues in schools. Schools value highly the support and advice given. There is a clear policy on child protection. Guidance is updated regularly and training and advice provided for schools and governors. The LEA has established a register of named teachers and monitors attendance at courses. There is good take-up of training. Support is currently provided by three officers, each with specific responsibilities, although the LEA plans to appoint a single officer with oversight of the whole area.

167. The LEA is developing a strategy for encouraging health-promoting schools and is awaiting accreditation of its scheme. This is well-conceived and includes citizenship as well as personal and social education. There is a clear plan for developing drugs and alcohol education, involving partnership with the city drugs and alcohol advisory team and the youth service. A model drugs policy has been published to support schools in developing their own. Courses on drugs education are provided for newly qualified teachers. Some imaginative strategies for drugs education are in use, including a theatre in education project. Clear guidance has also been provided on sex and relationships education.

168. Monitoring of provision is providing valuable evidence of schools' development and training needs. For example, surveys have recently been carried out to identify whether schools have designated teachers and policies for drugs and sex education.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the value and accuracy of the school organisation plan and to promote its use in medium term planning at school level:

- include reference to the future of nursery and special schools and to the effects of the inclusion strategy in the revised plan; and
- share with headteachers the pupil projection data.

In order to improve provision of education otherwise than at school:

- review, evaluate and strengthen the provision for primary age pupils to ensure that it better meets pupils' needs.

In order to improve support for attendance:

- establish and implement the new attendance policy in consultation with schools.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- review the provision for primary age pupils with very challenging behaviour in consultation with schools, the social services department and the health authority.

In order to provide more effective support for children in public care:

- establish better monitoring systems as a matter of urgency; and
- put in place strategies for training and target setting.

In order to improve support for Traveller children:

- strengthen strategies for identifying school age Traveller children in the city; and
- monitor carefully the attainment of Traveller children and set appropriate targets for them.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve LEA-school relationships and the funding mechanism for schools:

- establish clear responsibility in the education department senior management team for financial policy development and the oversight of financial strategy and control;

- make clear to all stakeholders what the medium-term targets for improvements to funding are, the strategy for achieving them, and what the mechanisms for consultation and reporting will be; and

- continue to review the schools' funding formula in line with emerging proposals to align funding more closely to needs and to key objectives.

In order to ensure that the Best Value initiative has a positive impact on its performance:

- apply the performance management system consistently across the education department;

- publish all improvement targets;

- clarify committee roles and establish a scrutiny function;

- apply the principles of challenge and competition rigorously; and

- engage schools more actively in applying Best Value principles.

In order to improve monitoring, support, challenge and intervention:

- take further steps to ensure that schools understand the LEA's responsibilities to monitor and challenge schools, and to intervene in and support those that it considers are a cause for concern;

- ensure that the allocation of adviser visits to schools is demonstrably proportionate to their needs, and that schools are clear about the purpose and cost basis of all visits; and

- provide sharper definitions of the four levels of priority to ensure that headteachers and governors understand how a level, if any, applies to their school, and the bases on which decisions are reached about the kinds of additional support to be provided.

In order to improve the usability of data by schools:

- work with headteachers to examine the range and format of the data provided for schools and ensure that it is made available in the best format to encourage and facilitate its use;

- provide clear guidance to ensure that headteachers and others understand how to interpret the data and how it can be used in the management of school improvement; and

- improve target-setting by providing clearer guidance on how schools can determine a suitable degree of challenge.

In order to improve the support to governors, and to enable them to carry out their roles more effectively:

- take steps to ensure that governors are fully consulted about all strategic decisions that affect their schools;

- ensure that chairs of governing bodies receive any documents, including reports following ARC visits, that are likely to assist them in discharging their responsibilities for standards and quality in the school; and

- in the absence of a centrally-provided clerking service, continue to explore ways of improving the direct contact between the LEA and governors and extend this to more schools.

In order to make better use of resources and the high quality of provision for nursery pupils:

- clarify the strategy for and role of the different nursery education providers;

- review the quality and value for money of nursery provision across the different sectors; and

- ensure that training meets the needs of all early years staff.

In order to improve the corporate working of the Council, to enable it to work towards achieving its priorities and to improve communication:

- produce a corporate plan.

In order to ensure that the Council's decision-making processes are clearly understood:

- review, clarify and define the decision-making processes.

In order to improve efficiency:

- undertake an examination of the mechanism of data collection and input for payroll.

In order to maximise the management potential of ICT systems:

- provide training for headteachers to raise their awareness of and skills in the use of ICT applications.

In order to provide benchmarks for service managers and schools:

- make available to schools more information on alternative suppliers of services.

In order to improve the value of the strategic capital plan:

- include a statement of sources and amounts of funds.

In order to ensure effective convergence of the LEA's and schools' asset management plans:

- target resources at improving the dialogue between LEA and schools.

In order to ensure that the future of special educational needs provision is planned effectively to meet the needs of pupils:

- define clearly the overall strategy for the development of provision for special educational needs;

- make explicit the definition of 'inclusion' as it relates to pupils with special educational needs;

- make clearer the rationale for deploying resources;

- monitor more closely the provision for pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure that pupils' needs are met appropriately; and

- consult schools fully about proposals in order that they may consider these and inform the debate about future provision.

In order to improve the value and accuracy of the school organisation plan and to promote its use in medium term planning at school level:

- include reference to the future of nursery and special schools and to the effects of the inclusion strategy in the revised plan; and

- share with headteachers the pupil projection data.

In order to improve provision of education otherwise than at school:

- review, evaluate and strengthen the provision for primary age pupils to ensure that it better meets pupils' needs.

In order to improve support for attendance:

- establish and implement the new attendance policy in consultation with schools.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- review the provision for primary age pupils with very challenging behaviour in consultation with schools, the social services department and the health authority.

In order to provide more effective support for children in public care:

- establish better monitoring systems as a matter of urgency; and

- put in place strategies for training and target setting.

In order to improve support for Traveller children:

- strengthen strategies for identifying school age Traveller children in the city; and

- monitor carefully the attainment of Traveller children and set appropriate targets for them.