



Office for Standards
in Education

Coventry

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: May 2004

Reporting Inspector: Gina White HMI



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Basic information

Name of LEA:	Coventry Local Education Authority
LEA number:	331
Address of LEA:	Coventry City Council New Council Offices Little Park Street Coventry CV1 5RS
Reporting Inspector:	Gina White HMI
Date of Inspection:	May 2004

Summary

Introduction

Coventry is a city that is in a process of change, successfully rebuilding following recession, increasingly affluent, and poised to move further forward. However, it is also a city with significant pockets of deprivation. Over one third of children live in the north and east of the city where the concentration of deprivation is amongst the highest in the country. Significant movement between schools, coupled with the arrival annually of around 250 refugee and asylum seeker children presents particular challenges to the council and to some schools and teachers.

Since the last inspection, standards of attainment in schools have improved slightly and are broadly in line with national averages except in Key Stages 2 and 4, where they are below. Attainment is in line with statistical neighbours¹ except in Key Stage 3 English and mathematics where it is above their average. Rates of improvement are in line with the national figures. The gap between the average of performance of Coventry pupils and that of pupils from some minority ethnic groups and looked after children is a cause for concern, as it is nationally.

There have been significant changes to the council and within the education department since the previous inspection. Following local elections in 2003, the council was left with no overall political control but there remains strong cross-party support for education. There is a new chief executive and, since April 2003, a new director of education and libraries. The education department has been restructured to reduce services from six to four divisions leading to redefined roles for some existing staff and to some new appointments.

¹ Coventry LEA's statistical neighbours are: Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Southampton, Walsall, Oldham, Bolton, Rochdale, Salford, City of Derby and City of Kingston upon Hull

Main findings

Summary: Coventry is a good local education authority (LEA). It has exceptionally strong partnerships, and these, combined with improved systems and procedures, underpin good support for 14-19 education and for school improvement functions. Support for national strategies is good. Standards in schools have been improving at the same pace as nationally, but the LEA has not made the progress it expected in raising attainment in early years and at Key Stages 2 and 4, and for pupils who are looked after by the local authority. New leadership and reorganisation have increased the pace of development. The LEA is beginning to benefit from increasingly stronger support corporately and in social services. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The strengths of the LEA lie in high ambition, open communication, strong relationships with schools and securing a consensus view about the action needed to make improvements. These features indicate that the LEA has good capacity for further improvement.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
High priority given to education by elected members Good leadership and professional support of officers High levels of confidence and trust of schools Very good partnerships and collaboration Good support for 14-19 education	Insufficient attention to some crucial aspects of early years support Insufficient use of data in targeting resources
Strategy for education and its implementation	
The strategy for education The LEA's knowledge of its schools Support for underperforming schools Arrangements for the provision of school places and admissions to schools	
Support to improve education in schools	
Good professional support for senior managers and networks to facilitate collaboration between schools Support for national initiatives in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 Support for school governors Successful strategies to promote recruitment and retention of teachers	Challenging and engaging all schools to take action to support gifted and talented pupils. Outdated practices in the pricing and length of some service level agreements
Support for special educational needs	
High quality statements, thorough procedures for making assessments and effective parent partnership arrangements	The slow speed of strategy development Insufficient focus on identifying and monitoring impact of strategies and resources on achievement of SEN pupils
Support for social inclusion	
Vision and leadership for inclusion and SEN strategy Progress in tackling high exclusions Good and wide ranging strategies to promote attendance	Low attainment of some groups of looked after and vulnerable children

Recommendations

Key recommendations

Support for Early Years

- Ensure that planning and deployment of resources gives more attention to improving children's educational attainment.
- Ensure that the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors are fully involved in the development of early years strategy.
- Improve the quality of transition arrangements between nursery settings and schools.

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

Targeting of resources: make full use of the information gained through monitoring to refine service planning and to target resources to secure improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Strategy for education and its implementation

Monitoring challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support: improve support for successful schools, by giving these schools a greater role in shaping the process and outcomes of their annual performance reviews.

Support to improve education in schools

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children: challenge individual schools to focus more sharply on improving the achievement of minority ethnic pupils.

Support for gifted and talented pupils: track the progress of pupils identified as gifted and talented, particularly on transfer to other schools.

Planning and provision of services to support school management: revise SLAs with schools so that prices for services are set on the basis of a fee for service.

Support for special educational needs

The strategy for SEN: finalise and implement an inclusion plan, specifying the implications for all schools and setting detailed timelines and realistic progress targets.

SEN functions to support school improvement: improve procedures for evaluating the impact of provision on pupils' progress and attainment during the schools' performance review; and accelerate the development of the use of P scales.

Support for social inclusion

Provision for pupils educated other than at school: ensure that evaluation reports give more attention to the impact of alternative provision on the attainment and attendance of children without a school place.

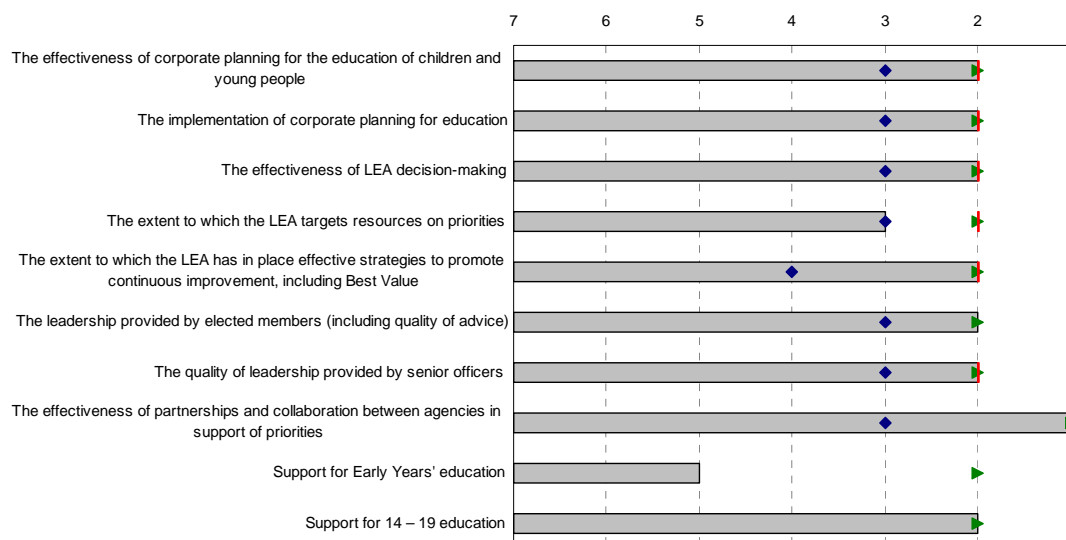
Support for behaviour: ensure that targets and reporting procedures for behaviour projects focus more on the impact on pupils' attainment and attendance.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection: ensure that an accurate shared record is kept by education and social services departments on school and teacher attendance at child protection training.

Provision for looked after children: ensure a personal educational plan is completed for each looked after child; and analyse information regularly by school, by Key Stage and in relation to pupils' progress in achieving their attendance, attainment and behaviour targets.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Corporate planning and its implementation continue to be good. In December 2002 Coventry city council was graded as poor in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. In response, the council produced a comprehensive modernisation and improvement plan (MIP). During the past 18 months, the MIP has been the main focus of corporate attention; it has been implemented assiduously and monitored intensively. The success of this was recognised by the Audit Commission in the follow up corporate assessment in February 2004, which noted considerable improvements in the council's corporate capacity.

2. Education has traditionally been the council's main strength and its further development and improvement were important components of the MIP. The council is making effective use of this strength in order to provide support to social services. This has the potential to make a major contribution to the council's work on social inclusion and combating disadvantage. Progress towards better co-ordination of support for looked after children, and vulnerable children and families is developing well.

3. There are strong links between corporate and education service plans. The education service contributes to all seven corporate objectives, particularly assisting the improvement in social services, narrowing the gap between the most deprived communities and the better off, and reducing crime and the fear of crime. It is clear how the education service is intended to contribute to the council's overall aims to make Coventry a world class city. Education features strongly in the community strategy and in the work of the local

strategic partnership. Very good partnerships have been maintained and in respect of the 14-19 work, have been extended. Good arrangements are in place for consultation; external partners and schools actively endorse council plans for education.

4. Education is well led and officers provide strong, professional support. They have secured high levels of confidence and trust of schools. Good structures are in place to enable officers and councillors to monitor the implementation of corporate plans. The director of education reports regularly to the chief executive and there is also a termly review of performance led by the cabinet member for education. The main areas of weakness are in the limited use of evaluation to identify early intervention strategies and in defining learner outcomes and targets more precisely. For example, in early years provision, corporate planning does not draw out the potential of targeted investment in childcare providers and nurseries to the impact on children's long-term educational attainment.

Decision-making

5. Consultation with schools and other partners is extensive and contributes effectively to policy formulation. The council is prepared to take difficult decisions; for example, in the past three years it has decided to remove some 3000 primary school places. This has prepared the ground well for difficult decisions about the future of special schools in the city, which will be made in the coming months. Decisions are taken at appropriate levels in the structure, by officers, cabinet member or full cabinet. Officers provide good, clear advice to councillors to enable effective decision-making and to support scrutiny.

Targeting of resources

6. This is highly satisfactory. Education has been a priority for the council for a long time and it has consistently spent more than the standard spending assessment and formula spending share allocation on education. The LEA has also been successful in gaining access to a wide range of funds, particularly to improve the attainment of underachieving students and to enhance the contribution that schools make to the regeneration of their communities.

7. The LEA consults schools extensively and they have a good understanding of its funding policy. The authority retains more funding than comparable LEAs. However, individual school budgets are slightly higher than in similar authorities and therefore schools welcome the wide range of school support and staff development activity that the retained funding provides. Budget-making and monitoring processes are sound and schools are not holding excessive budget balances. The council has prepared a medium term financial strategy that commits it to passing on future funding increases to schools.

8. While allocation of resources to services is well defined, deployment within some services is not sharply focussed. In planning support for early years and some vulnerable groups, for example, the evaluation of data is not precise enough. As a result, resources are not being directed to have maximum impact on improving attainment.

Recommendation

Make full use of the information gained through monitoring to refine service planning and to target resources to secure improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

9. Elected members have a good understanding of education and view the education service as the key to Coventry's prosperity. The cabinet member for education, working with senior managers, monitors the performance of the education service termly. Senior councillors are active in explaining difficult issues to the community, such as decisions about reducing school places. Councillors receive good and timely advice from officers. There is mutual respect between officers and elected members and proper recognition of the respective roles of each.

10. The education scrutiny panel has sought to focus its attention on issues that give it cause for concern. It has made impact on the areas that it has examined, such as the work of community centres. Attention to other aspects of the education service is planned.

Support for Early Years

11. At the time of the previous inspection, provision in early years was good. The authority was making good progress, particularly in securing childcare and nursery places. Since then, although early years provision has increased, developments have lacked co-ordination and have had little effect in raising children's attainment. Support is now unsatisfactory.

12. The authority has sufficient educational provision for all three- and four-year-olds across the city. A comprehensive review is underway to realign the provision to ensure it is more responsive to children's and parents' needs, as stated later in this report. The council has made a firm commitment to invest in a range of childcare opportunities drawing upon experience of Sure Start and Children's Centres. Good models of integrated provision are developing. However, improving children's educational attainment across the age range of 0-8 years does not feature strongly enough in the plans. For example, plans do not identify any city-wide targets to improve the attainment of children in early years settings and the deployment of resources is not sufficiently defined. Officers, stakeholders and partners are not consistently clear about the roles and responsibilities of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and how it will influence corporate strategy for early years education.

13. Following a training programme, schools are beginning to use Foundation Stage profiling and moderation. However, the training was not differentiated enough to cater for all needs; some private sector providers remain confused about their responsibilities in relation to the 'stepping stones' and Foundation Stage. Children's transition from nursery to reception is not co-ordinated well enough across the private and maintained sectors. For example, information about children is not always transferred. Similarly, despite the high proportion of asylum seekers and refugees, early years settings receive insufficient guidance

from the LEA on early intervention in language development. The authority faces a major challenge to ensure a consistent approach to early education across the city.

Recommendations

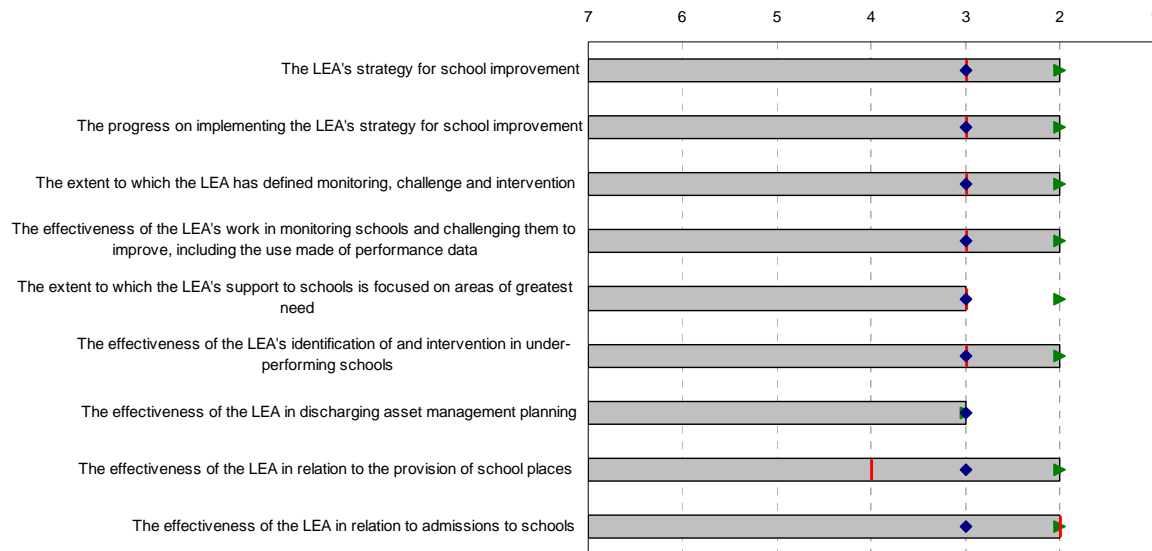
Ensure that planning and deployment of resources gives more attention to improving children's educational attainment.

Ensure that the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors are fully involved in the development of early years strategy.

Improve the quality of transition arrangements between nursery settings and schools.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

14. The LEA's strategy for school improvement and its implementation have improved and are now good. There is a strong commitment to promoting school autonomy. The current Education Development Plan (EDP) is good. Its priorities are clear and flow naturally from a thorough audit. The strategy for school improvement is plainly set out and backed up by strong service planning. The work of partners in developing the Education Action Zone (EAZ), Excellence Cluster and the 14-19 partnership is well integrated into planning. The LEA has set itself challenging but realistic targets for improvement. Most actions have been implemented on time and monitoring is good, with detailed progress reports for each priority. Planning to support schools causing concern continues to be effective and the processes involved are well understood by schools. Elected members receive good reports on the performance and progress of schools.

15. The LEA continues to challenge effectively the improvement targets set by some schools. Schools and school improvement advisers now make more confident use of benchmark data and the school performance review process has been refined. Electronic transfer of data is done smoothly and speedily, and the software package used is very effective and highly rated by schools. The LEA has good knowledge of and good relations with all its schools and the allocation of resources is discussed openly with the schools forum.

16. Despite the good progress made in supporting schools, pupils' performance is mixed and standards achieved, though improving, are not yet consistently high enough. There have

been steady increases in the proportion of pupils attaining five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades A*-C compared to statistical neighbours, but performance remains below the national average. In 2003, no secondary school met its target for five or more GCSE grades A*-G and pupils' progress in Key Stage 4 is below national rates.

17. Schools are also closely involved in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school improvement programme. However, the identification of the impact of specific actions in the school improvement programme is not sufficiently robust and the targeting of support to close the attainment gaps with performance nationally, is not precise. The bringing together of the inclusion and the school improvement services into one division has helped to raise officers' awareness of issues that need to be addressed and has improved the co-ordination of support. Area team meetings are especially effective in helping the LEA to track the progress of schools in difficulties. Nevertheless, this structural change has not yet had the expected impact on improving the performance of schools and pupils.

The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support

18. This area of the LEA's work is now mainly good. Definitions, procedures and criteria for monitoring, challenge and intervention continue to be clear and focused and schools understand the category in which they are placed and why.

19. The LEA has made highly satisfactory progress in differentiating support since the previous inspection and it now reflects schools' varying needs. Good access to benchmark data has helped to improve the targeting of support at schools with the greatest need. School improvement advisers are allocated a minimum of two days to prepare for and conduct each annual school performance review. However, while the intention is to differentiate such activity to reflect each school's needs, successful schools still receive too great an entitlement to centrally-resourced support and are not actively enough involved in shaping the review's process and outcomes.

20. The LEA's approach to discussing targets with schools is robust but sensitive, with data used effectively to highlight any lack of ambition. In the primary sector, a software package is particularly effective in identifying any pupils' underachievement.

21. Good use is made of partnerships between schools and there is good integration of the work of various national initiatives, for example, the Excellence Cluster and the leadership improvement grant. The two teaching and learning partnerships provide useful support for departments at secondary level, with the sharing of expertise between schools and brokerage arrangements filling gaps in coverage. Advisory teachers also provide good support for subject teachers at both primary and secondary level.

22. Notes of visits to schools by improvement advisers are not circulated promptly. They are copied to chairs of governors at the end of the review process, rather than at the beginning. The proforma used to record the outcomes of the performance review is not flexible enough to meet changing needs and priorities; for example, it does not lend itself to recording of attainment of vulnerable pupils.

Recommendation

Improve support for successful schools, by giving these schools a greater role in shaping the process and outcomes of their annual performance reviews.

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools

23. The LEA's work in supporting underperforming schools has improved and is now good. Only one school requires special measures and there are currently no schools identified as having serious weaknesses. Schools that have previously been subject to special measures have all been removed from this category within the required timescales. During the last 12 months, there has been one case of a school requiring special measures and another has been identified as underachieving.

24. Fieldwork in the inspection focused particularly on the LEA's effectiveness in preventing schools being identified by Ofsted as requiring special measures, having serious weaknesses or underachieving. The LEA currently has only a small minority of schools that give it cause for concern, and the school performance review process is effective in identifying weaknesses. The triggers by which the LEA identifies a school in difficulties are now much more robust and they are particularly sophisticated at secondary level. Action plans, through which schools in difficulties are helped to recover, are of good quality. The monitoring of schools' progress through meetings of the area team and LEA senior management, and through individual case conferences is very effective. In a small number of schools, where the quality of the senior management or governance has impeded a school's recovery, firm and decisive action has been taken. Support is withdrawn from schools when it is no longer required and most schools are comfortable with purchasing extra help through the school improvement service level agreement.

Asset management planning

25. At the time of the previous inspection, aspects of implementation of the asset management plan had not been handled well, surveys had been completed late and the structural arrangements of the LEA seemed unlikely to meet future needs.

26. This function is now highly satisfactory. The authority has a fully operational planning process that supports schools in managing capital expenditure in a way that promotes their autonomy. The LEA completed initial condition surveys of all of its schools in 2001 and two thirds of the schools have been re-surveyed in the past 18 months. As a result, LEA data are kept up-to-date. There is currently little backlog of condition work and this is comparable with the best performing LEAs. Plans for the further development of school buildings are well linked to plans for school improvement, reducing surplus places and developing school-based provision for adult and community learning. The LEA has recruited additional staff to prepare the plan and manage its capital programme. The plan has been approved by the DfES following satisfactory progress by the LEA.

27. Good arrangements are in place to consult schools, both collectively and individually, about priorities and the use of capital funds. The LEA is well informed about

how schools use devolved capital. It has identified the investment that is needed in its schools in order to realise its ambition, but this will be dependent on favourable grants and its implementation depends upon funding through the Building Schools for the Future initiative. The LEA has yet to develop contingency plans if this funding does not come on stream as quickly as it hopes.

Providing school places

28. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved significantly and is now good. The previous inspection report recommended that the LEA begin formal consultation on the removal of surplus places in primary schools in autumn of 2000 and address the issue of under utilisation of nursery facilities. The LEA has taken effective action in response to this recommendation. Following consultation, 1,575 places have been removed from primary schools since 2001. The child population in the city is continuing to decline and the council is now taking steps, through the school organisation committee, to remove a further 1,446 primary places. As a result the level of surplus places is forecast to reduce, from 10.5% to an acceptable level of 8.3% overall in primary schools by 2008. Following consultation with the EYDCP, proposals have been made to remove 429 nursery places from community schools. This will significantly reduce the growing surplus of places in early years settings from 28% to 15%. Parents prefer places that offer extended care but most schools currently offer only half-time nursery education. In this respect the council has been slow to react to their needs over the last four years. It is now committed to modifying plans to meet the needs of parents and children better by developing the range of its nursery education provision to include extended care, particularly in the most deprived areas of the city.

29. The council is making good use of the opportunities provided by the removal of surplus places to improve accommodation and to extend the range of services offered through schools. It has built two new primary schools with extensive adult learning and community facilities in a deprived area, with New Deal for Communities funding.

30. At present, the proportion of surplus places in secondary schools (7%) is not excessive. Only two schools have more than 25% surplus places and in one of these the surplus is declining as the school becomes more popular. The council has a strategic vision for the future of secondary education in the city that involves building new inclusive schools with improved facilities. The strategy is intended to ensure that surplus secondary places remain at an acceptable level beyond 2008. The council acknowledges that it has too many special schools. The LEA has plans to reorganise special schools in the city as part of a more general strategy for social inclusion; the proposals underpinning this reorganisation will shortly go out for formal consultation. Specific plans for change are in preparation but the pace of implementation will depend upon the availability of capital funds.

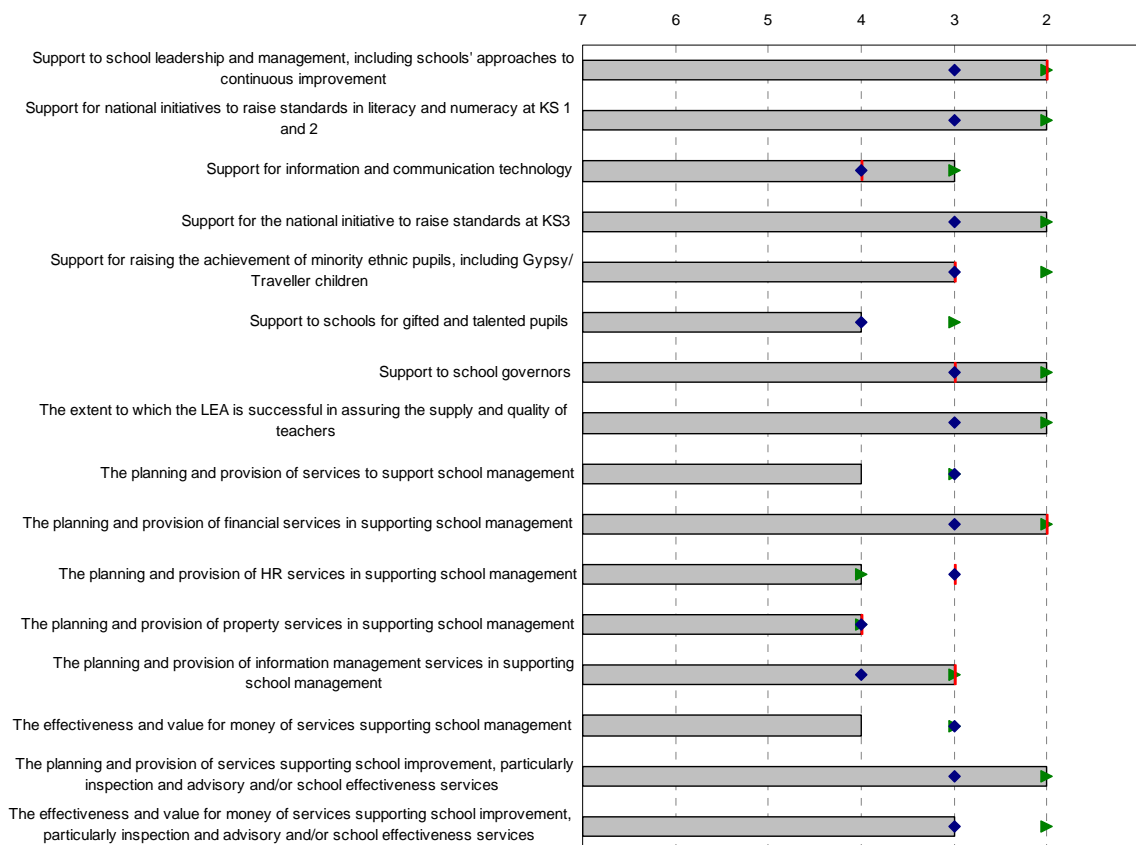
Admissions to schools

31. The management of school admissions remains good. Admissions for all primary schools and all but one secondary school are administered by the LEA in order to ensure equitable application of admissions criteria. Plans for co-ordinated admissions arrangements are well advanced. The proportion of parents getting their first choice of secondary school, 87% in 2003, is satisfactory. Admissions appeals are managed efficiently and are completed

by the end of May, in time for pupils to participate in induction activities at their new schools. The LEA has secured an agreement among all the city's secondary schools to admit pupils who are excluded from other schools and would benefit from a fresh start in a new setting.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



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Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

32. The support provided to school leaders and managers is good, with particular strength in that given to underperforming schools. Work to support staff in these schools is well planned and is given high priority by the authority. The quality of school leadership and management is improving and the number of schools requiring specific intervention has reduced.

33. Significant progress has been made in providing schools with useful performance and financial data. Sophisticated data packages have been developed, which schools find effective in providing benchmarks and identifying underperformance.

34. The authority gives schools good support in developing self-evaluation. Initial training has been provided for senior managers with a particular focus on developing more inclusive schools. Many schools have already taken up this training. Further guidance in the

form of the LEA's recently published inclusion standards are intended to follow on from the training. Link advisers play a useful role in the annual cycle of school self review. Schools value the support and challenge of these meetings.

35. A comprehensive programme of continuing professional development is provided for senior and middle managers. The take-up of national qualifications and LEA management training opportunities is very high.

36. A significant strength of the LEA is its willingness to participate in relevant research and project work at regional and national level. This has added greatly to the LEA's extensive career development programme. Teachers have benefited from these opportunities, developing specific expertise to improve schools. The LEA has drawn effectively upon this work to form task groups, identify advanced skills teachers, provide further support to national initiatives, and extend the work of the Excellence Cluster. Teachers are supported well in developing good practice in their own schools and in sharing new methods and resources with other schools. They meet regularly with LEA consultants in order to keep abreast of latest developments and to benefit from the strong ethos of collaboration. Although at an early stage good use is made of the leadership incentive grant and the management development strand of the national primary strategy.

37. The area review meetings, involving staff from all services connected with school improvement, provide an opportunity to link individual school casework to city-wide corporate priorities, as well as to check the impact of the work being done and agree where further action is necessary. The inclusion of the special needs service and of the minority group support services at these meetings has helped provide a full picture and give greater emphasis to identifying underachievement. This broadening of the team provides the potential for the LEA to challenge schools more robustly on issues about the attainment of individuals and groups of pupils.

Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3

38. Support for the national initiatives at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is good and firmly established. It is based on a strong analysis of data about pupils' performance in English and maths, and good knowledge of individual schools. The target-setting process is used well; challenging and constructive discussion often leads to a significant rise in the level of targets. There is consistent evidence that the intensive support for schools is effective. The implementation of the national Intensive Support Programme has been carefully linked to existing arrangements so that there is continuity and development for schools involved. Pupil data are used effectively to track progress through the key stages. This contributes well to transition to Key Stage 3. Support to promote the Key Stage 3 strategy is good.

39. The introduction of the primary leadership programme has been managed well. The work of link advisers is co-ordinated well with that of the literacy and numeracy consultants. The authority has therefore built up good knowledge of the capacity of schools' leadership to move from narrowly focused work in literacy and numeracy to the wider approaches demanded in the National Primary Strategy.

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children

40. This service is highly satisfactory. It has helped schools meet effectively the increased demands from the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers. Support is more firmly integrated into the work of the whole school improvement service than at the time of the previous inspection. A strategy group, established within the last year, ensures that this important corporate priority receives sufficient attention.

41. The authority maintains clear records of the achievements of minority ethnic pupils at the end of each key stage. These provide a city-wide perspective as well as analysis by individual schools. There is underachievement by some groups: Pakistani, Black African and Black Caribbean pupils at Key Stage 2. By age 16 these groups are improving at a faster rate than average, and girls do particularly well. However, the performance of Black Caribbean and Pakistani heritage boys remains worryingly low and is not high enough to ensure that the achievement gap will close completely. The LEA are implementing activity to tackle pupils underperformance, for example; small-scale out-of-hours study projects to support Black pupils. Good records are also kept on the location of recently arrived pupils including when they secure a school place. The majority are placed quickly. The attendance of Traveller children is carefully logged.

42. The integration of the Minority Group Support Service (MGSS) within the school improvement service ensures attention is focussed on improving achievements of minority ethnic pupils and is beginning to highlight issues for the school performance review. However, there is not enough evidence of significant and persistent challenge of individual schools to ensure that the LEA's aims and plans to improve minority ethnic achievement will be realised.

Recommendation

Challenge individual schools to focus more sharply on improving the achievement of minority ethnic pupils.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

43. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory. The authority's policy helps schools in identifying gifted and talented pupils. Support across all schools is at a relatively early stage and robust systems have yet to be established to assist schools and advisers in monitoring the progress of the gifted and talented cohort.

44. The LEA has provided significant and influential training to schools and made good practice widely known through its meetings and networks. Through the excellence cluster, schools are developing a continuum of support, from pre-school through to older pupils. The LEA makes good use of projects and initiatives to provide a broad range of sporting and cultural opportunities. In addition, schools within the Excellence Cluster are successfully encouraging older pupils to raise their aspirations to consider higher education. This provision is not yet available to support all Coventry's gifted and talented pupils. A strategy group has been formed to draw the existing strands of support into a fully cohesive

strategy for gifted and talented pupils and an adviser has been appointed to take specific responsibility to support these pupils. Such actions are overdue and necessary to ensure further progress.

45. The definition of gifted and talented pupils adopted by the LEA is suitably broad and has, for example, inspired the staff of a special school to identify some pupils and enable them to have very significant experiences and achievements. However, current monitoring is narrow and focused on ensuring systems are in place. It has yet to delve deeper to focus on pupils' individual progress and breadth of achievement or capture how particular gifts and talents are being developed. The LEA does not track the progress of the cohort of gifted and talented pupils as a whole. Some primary schools track the progress of pupils as they move to other schools. Arrangements for ensuring progression of cohorts of gifted and talented pupils, both academically and in their talents, are inconsistent. The LEA has identified these problems and plans are in place to tackle most of them.

Recommendation

Track the progress of pupils identified as gifted and talented, particularly on transfer to other schools.

Planning and provision of services to support school management

46. The quality of management services has improved since the last inspection and these services are now at least satisfactory. The general approach to procuring, or the provision of services is secure, although some service level agreements are still too long-term.

47. The LEA offers a full range of support services to schools but also provides assistance with the procurement of alternative providers when schools request it. The LEA has established extensive and open arrangements to consult schools about the nature and quality of the services it provides. Working groups of headteachers from each phase meet regularly to monitor the performance of management services and to provide feedback to service providers. Schools are generally satisfied with services provided by the LEA and a very high proportion buy services from the authority.

48. SLAs are clear and offer a choice of service levels. However, contracts for some services run over lengthy periods. For some services, prices are set on the basis of the amount delegated to the school for that service through the fair funding formula rather than on the basis of a fee for service. This reduces price transparency and is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation

Revise SLAs with schools so that prices for services are set on the basis of a fee for service.

49. The area of property services remains satisfactory. Prospects for improvement are promising. The council has recently used an innovative approach to procure the construction of three new schools. In contrast to some previous projects, these schemes are being delivered ahead of time and within budget. In the past year, the council has undertaken a

major re-structuring of contracting services across the council. It has made improvements, though these are not yet fully embedded.

50. Property services for schools are more responsive to the needs of the individual school. Services consult appropriately over property management and building matters. SLAs are flexible and provide schools with technical advice provided by the LEA and an opportunity to select from a range of approved building contractors. The council operates an effective system for schools to pool funds to insure against large, unforeseen repair and maintenance bills.

51. In the previous inspection most aspects of ICT support for school administration were very good with the exception being the unsatisfactory development and use of electronic communications. This aspect has now improved and this area is now highly satisfactory. Strengths noted in the previous inspection, such as information analysis and support for school administration systems, remain.

52. The council has embarked on an ambitious corporate strategy to improve its ICT infrastructure. Nearly all schools now have broadband connections, and the authority is on track to meet the national target date. Effective electronic communication takes place between the LEA and schools. The Coventry schools learning network (intranet) offers schools access to a growing range of curriculum and teaching support materials. Some policy and administrative information is made available through this and also through the council's main website.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

53. This area is satisfactory. Service planning and provision are sound. The authority is committed to working with schools to improve services and to refine SLAs to meet schools' needs better. Service performance is regularly discussed with schools and, where necessary, steps taken to make changes to SLAs or to delivery. However, while there is extensive discussion about service levels and quality, there is no regular fundamental challenge to the council as principal service provider. Service performance is reported to councillors as part of regular reporting on the performance of the education service. Service costs are in line with those of other LEAs.

The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services

54. The planning and provision of services to support school improvement are good. Since the previous inspection, services have been reorganised and lines of responsibility have been redrawn under new service leaders.

55. Staff and resources are effectively aligned to priorities and actions in the EDP. Literacy and numeracy support teams are well focussed and work collaboratively. The LEA takes positive action to improve and strengthen services. Plans to extend the support for behaviour and for gifted and talented pupils are well advanced.

56. Service plans set out an extensive agenda for development. They draw together effectively the aims, priorities and actions from the EDP and corporate plans. Staff have a clear, shared understanding of the procedures in their division and branch, the priorities and targets for their particular service and their role in delivering them. Arrangements for performance management are good and there is systematic linking of individual staff targets to specific functions and targets within the EDP. Arrangements for the induction of new staff are effective.

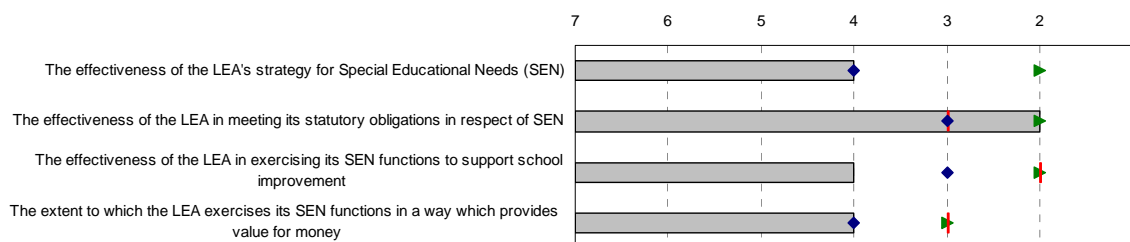
57. Funding to purchase curriculum advice and support is properly delegated to schools, but in practice they choose to purchase the LEA's own service. The authority retains a large service to provide specialist curriculum advice and support to schools and appropriately buys in specialists to extend provision where needed. Subject teachers have good access to specialist curriculum advice and training and value the expertise.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

58. The school improvement service provides highly satisfactory value for money. There are positive trends in terms of pupils' performance and school improvement. Regular service reviews and reports are conducted on the impact of initiatives. When the need is perceived services are realigned, for example, to forge a closer link between school improvement and the SEN support teams. Schools in challenging circumstances receive ample and effective support and other schools frequently purchase support from the authority. The LEA makes good use of expert teachers and school managers to support other schools, thus making maximum use of resources and extending support services. However, the LEA does not play a strong role in encouraging schools to purchase support from a wide range of providers.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for SEN

59. The LEA's strategy for SEN is satisfactory. Implementation of the previously strong strategic planning was delayed by staffing issues. Interim management maintained the very good systems for statutory assessments and review of pupils' statements of SEN. Progress on the better allocation of resources and the evaluation of their use has been slow. The authority delegated funding to schools from April 2002. Criteria for delegating funding for special needs are now clear and known by schools. However, evaluation of the impact of the expenditure is still not well developed.

60. Elected members and officers have a good understanding of the emerging national agenda. They know that the number and cost of placements outside the LEA are too high, acknowledge the need to rationalise special needs provision, and are keen to integrate the very high numbers of pupils currently educated in special schools. The LEA has been slow to develop action plans to address these issues during the last four years. Proposals in the draft strategy, dated May 2004, put this omission right. However, the timescales and targets for action do not focus sharply enough on improved outcomes for pupils or give sufficient attention to how success will be measured. The LEA established a federation of special schools to meet the needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties in April 2004. It also plans to develop a regional centre for autism. The authority is rightly ambitious for these new developments.

61. The principle of greater inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream provision has been discussed with headteachers and some partners, and has their broad support. Formal consultation has yet to be extended to all schools and parents. The LEA has now made a secure permanent appointment at senior level. Combined with accelerated development of planning over the last year, capacity to improve SEN provision is good.

Recommendation

Finalise and implement an inclusion plan specifying the implications for all schools, and setting detailed timelines and realistic progress targets.

Statutory obligations

62. The LEA meets its statutory obligations well. The quality of SEN statements is very good. They contain perceptive assessments of pupils' needs and are very detailed about the level and kind of support that should be provided. The proportion of statutory assessments completed within the eighteen-week timescale is well above national and local figures. This stems from the well-established protocols that exist between the statutory agencies involved. Statements are reviewed regularly and amended effectively when required although the rate of reducing the number of statements is below average. The LEA's attendance at review meetings is suitably targeted to pupils at the point of transition or those educated outside the authority.

63. The parent partnership service provides a comprehensive and effective range of support and information to parents. As a result, the LEA has one of the lowest numbers of tribunal cases. Good use is made of the Midlands mediation service. The service is well managed and led and is constructively self critical, continually reviewing its work to achieve better value for money. An example of this is the plan to develop its website to improve communication channels with parents. When audited against other West Midlands authorities, the Coventry parent partnership mostly scored well.

SEN functions to support school improvement

64. The LEA's support in this area is satisfactory although its work has some strengths. The special needs support service is now part of the school improvement division providing better co-ordinated support to schools. The LEA continues to be responsive with expert advice and support and provides high quality training and advice for SEN co-ordinators. It promotes the national Code of Practice well. However, since the previous inspection the LEA has been too slow in establishing procedures to evaluate the progress made by pupils with SEN.

65. The LEA has broadened the annual school performance review to include consideration of SEN provision. The LEA has made belated but good progress in building attainment and management information into a data package. This now provides a potentially good tool for monitoring the progress of low attaining pupils and setting individualised targets, though not all school advisers have been trained in its use. Similarly, the LEA has been slow to support the use of P-scales although these are being used helpfully by some special schools in conjunction with partner primary schools to monitor progress and set targets for improvement.

Recommendations

Improve procedures for evaluating the impact of provision on pupils' progress and attainment during the schools' performance review.

Accelerate the development of the use of P-scales.

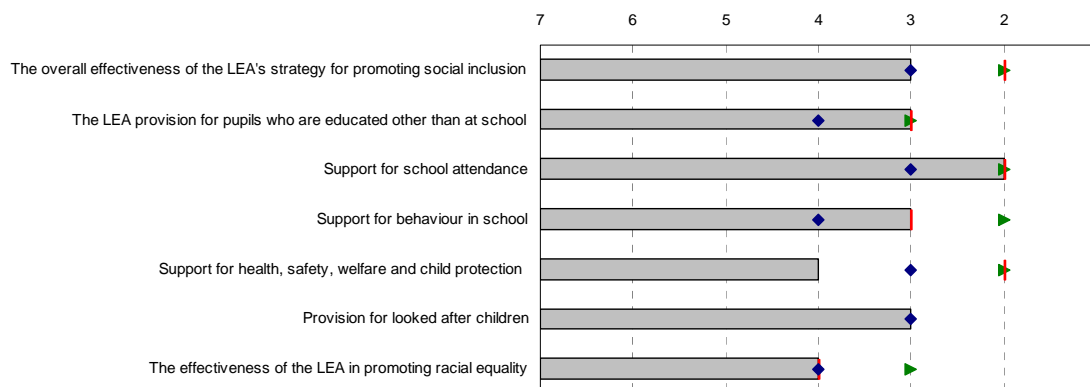
Value for money

66. At the previous inspection the LEA was judged to give very good value for money as costs were comparatively modest and spending on pupils outside the authority was low. However, value for money is now only satisfactory.

67. Clear criteria have been established for identifying pupils with SEN. These are reasonable, understood and widely supported by schools. Much of the funding is going to the right pupils. Moreover, the authority has delegated SEN funding to schools, in line with a recommendation of the previous inspection, thus ensuring that they have more autonomy. The authority's overall expenditure on SEN is broadly in line with that of similar authorities. However, a significant number of pupils are in expensive placements outside the LEA. It has now recognised this problem and has belatedly developed plans to reshape its provision in order to reduce costs and improve inclusion. The authority is unable to demonstrate that its expenditure on provision is producing above average results for the pupils.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for social inclusion

68. This aspect of the LEA's work is highly satisfactory because a continuum of support for pupils at risk of social exclusion is steadily being established. Work to support attendance is good and a wide range of strategies have been developed. Since the previous inspection, services have been brought together to work in multi-disciplinary area teams to provide specialist support to vulnerable and disadvantaged families. Further re-organisation is underway to establish a secondary inclusion team for September 2004.

69. Work to develop a formal strategy for inclusion has been given a fresh impetus in the last 12 months following the appointment of the director of education. He has provided strong and credible leadership at a corporate and department level. Corporate plans are coherent and link to the EDP. They are driven by the widely understood need to improve access of pupils with SEN to a broader range of specialist and mainstream provision across the city.

70. The values and principles of the draft strategy reflect the aims in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* and are firmly endorsed by elected members and headteachers. The strategy developed jointly by LEA officers and representative headteachers, paints in broad terms proposals to change and realign provision significantly over the next five years by developing inclusive, extended and full-service schools. The range of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups whose needs are to be considered is appropriately broad. However the draft strategy lacks important detail. The specific learning needs of each vulnerable and disadvantaged group are insufficiently aligned to targets and outcomes in plans and the resource implications have yet to be tackled. Consultation on the proposals to reshape provision is at a very early stage.

71. Partnership work with agencies has been strengthened through the establishment of a children and young people's strategic board. Progress has been swift and working practices and systems are well established. Sub-groups from the strategic board have been set up to plan the future roles of schools, key services and voluntary agencies. Work to establish a co-ordinated preventative strategy is developing well and an informative initial audit and map of service provision has been undertaken. Further work to involve pupils more closely in determining needs is underway. Elected members have demonstrated their firm commitment to listen to the views of children and young people to inform their decision-making. Children have been supported in making a response to the *Every Child Matters* consultation; elected members meet with looked after children and attend annual celebration events.

72. The LEA has a good track record of responding to national projects and initiatives and attracts significant external funding to support its work. It uses these funds well to broaden pupils' educational opportunities. For example, the use of external grants has enabled excluded pupils in Key Stage 4 to benefit from work-related learning and opportunities to study a wider range of vocational qualifications.

73. The authority has worked usefully with EAZs and Excellence Cluster initiatives to improve provision in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It has also made good use of short-term projects and initiatives to support underachieving groups such as asylum seeker and refugee children and those who have had frequent moves between schools. This good work has been shared more broadly across all schools and contributed to further work at a national level.

74. The increased pace of strategic planning, with its focus on co-ordinating and extending provision, is positive and places the LEA in a good position to develop inclusion practices.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

75. Provision for pupils educated other than at school remains highly satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has increased its support for pupils who have been excluded from school and enhanced its preventative work with disaffected pupils. It has maintained a well-targeted range of provision for pregnant schoolgirls, teenage mothers and sick children. Good partnerships and clear helpful guidance support pupils educated at home by parents.

76. The authority's management of provision is very sound. The costs of provision are monitored and medium and longer-term financial planning are developing well. Considerable effort is made to provide continuity with courses followed at schools and to achieve a stronger match to individual pupil's needs. Mechanisms for tracking pupils' progress and achievements are in place and work in each service is developing to include pupils' views of provision in monitoring reports. However, in general, service evaluation gives too little attention to the impact of provision on pupils' attainment and attendance.

77. The rate of success in the re-integration of excluded pupils has improved, especially for Key Stage 3 pupils; the rate is now above the national average and that in similar authorities. This reflects the firm action taken to secure agreements with secondary schools to accept excluded pupils. However, large numbers of pupils in Key Stage 4 have spent a

significant proportion of their secondary education in alternative provision. The provision for this group of pupils improved this year and now meets the minimum statutory requirements. Pregnant schoolgirls, teenage mothers and home educated pupils have opportunities to sit examinations. Most excluded pupils and teenage mothers continue with learning and training post-16.

78. Alternative courses, many leading to accreditation, are provided for excluded pupils but vocational opportunities are not yet available for all vulnerable groups. The LEA is aware of the weaknesses but has not developed costed plans to demonstrate how rapid improvement will be achieved.

Recommendation

Ensure that evaluation reports give more attention to the impact of alternative provision on the attainment and attendance of children without a school place.

Support for behaviour

79. Support to schools in managing behaviour remains highly satisfactory. Procedures for liaison with other agencies and services to support children's mental health and good behaviour are strong. The LEA has capitalised on opportunities provided through national developments and initiatives to strengthen behaviour support services. Provision and support to primary schools are appropriately focussed on early intervention through nurture groups. School inspection evidence indicates that behaviour in primary schools is in line with national averages and few pupils are excluded.

80. Training and focussed support to schools, particularly through the Key Stage 3 behaviour strategy help teachers and support staff to develop a broader range of strategies to deal with difficult behaviour. In addition, learning support units introduced into all secondary schools through the EAZs and Excellence Clusters provide a useful extra layer of support to manage behaviour, and support disaffected pupils. Schools value the support and are becoming increasingly confident in their ability to manage pupils' behaviour.

81. The LEA has acted quickly to refocus its work on improving behaviour at school rather than dealing with the results of poor behaviour. Significant progress has been made over the last year, and permanent and fixed term exclusion rates in secondary schools have fallen rapidly. Six courses to improve behaviour have been provided at Key Stage 3, and take-up is high. Although at an early stage, they are contributing effectively and none of the pupils who participated have been permanently excluded. Targets, projects and actions are drawn together and evaluated in the behaviour support plan and linked firmly to the EDP. However, there is insufficient focus on the impact that actions are having on improving pupils' attainment and attendance.

Recommendation

Ensure that targets and reporting procedures for behaviour projects focus more on the impact on pupils' attainment and attendance.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

82. The LEA support for health and safety, welfare and child protection is satisfactory. This inspection focused specifically on the rigour with which the authority was meeting its responsibilities for child protection.

83. Guidance for schools is good. Link teachers for child protection receive up-to-date information through productive inter-agency meetings, briefings and e-mail communication. A new protocol based around a single referral form has recently been developed. This is beginning to bring closer the working practices of the different agencies and speed up the management of cases. At a strategic level, officer liaison ensures reasonable steps are being taken to meet statutory duties.

84. The LEA seeks an annual return from schools to update its database for link child protection teachers. In addition, a protocol exists for schools whereby they notify the authority of any change in personnel in order that the LEA has an up-to-date list. The authority stipulates that all designated link teachers for child protection undertake a two-day introductory training course and update it every two years. The LEA's records of the attendance at this introductory training indicate gaps in the training of some teachers. However, all link teachers are about to undertake refresher training that has been specially arranged for them. In addition to the two-day training, a menu of inter-agency training is available for teachers but attendance records are kept separately by social services. Link teachers are very positive about the quality and usefulness of all the training.

Recommendation

Ensure that an accurate shared record is kept by education and social services departments on school and teacher attendance at child protection training.

Provision for looked after children

85. Support for looked after children is highly satisfactory. At the previous inspection, support was very good. Strengths in elected members' involvement remain and there have been improvements to elicit the views of children to inform decision-making. However, fieldwork in this inspection focused on pupils' achievement and on the use of personal educational plans and found that these aspects are not yet meeting new national expectations.

86. There has been significant improvement in the completion rate for children's personal education and care plans from 32% in July 2003 to 92% at the time of inspection. Targets for attainment and attendance in the plans are appropriately referenced to each child's prior performance. Systems for supporting, monitoring, and reviewing children's progress against these targets are developing. The LEA has taken action to improve information flow through the use of electronic systems but this has yet to become embedded across the services.

87. Realistic targets have been set for looked after children within the local public service agreement and in the EDP. They aim to narrow the wide gap in attainment at each key stage. Attainment is improving, particularly at Key Stage 4, but the LEA's targets have not been met. However, there has been some success in that 85% of looked after children

continued in education and training in 2003. Attendance is improving, but a small number of looked after children have very poor attendance. No looked after child was permanently excluded last year. Elected members have launched a scrutiny review to identify how attainment can be further improved.

Recommendations

Ensure a personal educational plan is completed for each looked after child.

Analyse information regularly by school, by key stage and in relation to pupil's progress in achieving their attendance, attainment and behaviour targets.

Promoting racial equality

88. Promotion of racial equality remains satisfactory. Corporate planning places a high priority on promoting racial equality and good small-scale project work in some schools has promoted tolerance and understanding. This inspection focused specifically on progress in monitoring and reporting racist incidents and the provision of training and guidance to schools in light of national changes in this area. Progress has been slow, but satisfactory as a result of the firmer line being taken in the last few months to gather racist incident responses from all schools.

89. Reasonable steps have been taken to provide updated advice and guidance to schools on developing race equality policies, bullying and harassment. Training on the council for Racial Equality standards has underpinned the guidance and a suitable record of training is maintained. Rates of attendance at the training vary from 40 to 84 schools but the LEA's actions and expectations of schools who do not attend are unclear.

90. The reporting of serious racist incidents is clearly defined and co-ordinated. The LEA has collected data on racist incidents from all schools for the first time this year, but gaps in returns from earlier years mean that the authority is unable to report, track and compare progress effectively. The LEA has recently revised its procedures to move to termly monitoring, which is likely to lead to better analysis of trends.

91. The achievement of minority ethnic pupils is monitored effectively by school improvement link advisers and the minority group support service. However, reliance on the link adviser giving prominence to wider racial issues within the school performance review meetings leaves some gaps. Pupils' progress is reported effectively to members. All schools have race equality policies, but a small minority have yet to be ratified by governors.

Appendix A

Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Coventry Local Education Authority
LEA number:	331
Reporting Inspector:	Gina White HMI
Date of Inspection:	May 2004

No	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Fieldwork*
	Context of the LEA		
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	5	
	Overall judgements		
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	4	
0.2	Overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
	Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership		
1.1	The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people	2	
1.2	The implementation of corporate planning for education	2	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	2	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	3	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	2	NF
1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	2	
1.7	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	2	NF

1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	1	NF
1.9	Support for Early Years education	5	
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	2	NF
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	2	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	2	
2.3	The performance of schools	4	
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	2	
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	2	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	2	
2.8	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	3	
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	
Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement			
3.1	Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement	2	
3.2	Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2	2	

3.3	Support for information and communication technology	3	NF
3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	2	NF
3.5	Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children	3	
3.6	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	4	
3.7	Support for school governors	2	NF
3.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	NF
3.9	The planning and provision of services to support school management	4	
3.9a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	2	NF
3.9b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	4	NF
3.9c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	4	
3.9d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	3	
3.10	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	4	
3.11	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	2	
3.12	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
Section 4: Support for special educational needs			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs	4	
4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	

4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	4	
Section 5: Support for social inclusion			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	3	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	3	
5.3	Support for school attendance	2	NF
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	3	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	4	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	3	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	4	

**NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory;
Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

[**Note:** in the case of 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparative national averages: Grades 1-2: Well above; Grade 3: Above; Grade 4: In line; Grade 5: Below; Grades 6-7: Well below]

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

This inspection of Coventry LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2000;

the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;

the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;

recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

<p>the LEA's strategies to support continuous improvement, including Best Value;</p> <p>the quality of leadership provided by senior officers;</p> <p>the effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities;</p> <p>support for 14 – 19 education;</p> <p>support for information and communication technology;</p> <p>support for the national initiative to raise standards at Key Stage 3;</p> <p>support for school governors;</p> <p>the extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers;</p>

the planning and provision of financial services;

the planning and provision of human resources services;

support for school attendance.

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

Context of the LEA

Coventry is a West Midlands city with a culturally and ethnically diverse population of 300,848 people. It has a long-established history of architectural and economic regeneration as it has moved successfully through recession, evolving from manufacturing to service industries. Coventry has grown in prosperity since 2000. However, this increasing affluence has been coupled with a widening gap between the most deprived areas and those that are better off. The concentration of deprivation has deepened since 2000 and is located mainly in areas towards the north and north east of the city with a very small pocket in the south west. Coventry is the 64th most deprived area in the country. Some 8.3% of children live in lone parent households and 29% of Coventry's population and nearly a third of 0–17 year olds live in the most deprived areas.

The school-age population has reduced slightly since the last inspection to 50,689 and is predicted to decline further over the next five years. This decline is already evident in primary schools; six schools have merged since the last inspection, to create three new schools. The school population is ethnically diverse and minority heritage pupils make up a quarter of the school population. Most of these pupils are of Indian or Pakistani heritage and come from well-established local communities. Since 1999, 1,415 asylum-seeker children have been admitted to Coventry schools. Of the 332 admitted last year, almost three-quarters entered primary schools. This results in significant movement into and between schools and particularly at Key Stage 2. The percentage of children for whom English is an additional language is increasing, particularly in primary schools, but remains broadly in line with national averages. Similarly, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, at 19.9% in primary and 17.1% in secondary, are in line with national averages.

The number of pupils with statements of SEN in primary (2.1%) and secondary schools (4.1%) has reduced since the last inspection and is in line with national averages. The proportion of primary-aged pupils placed in special schools is well above the national figure, while those for secondary pupils are in line.

Educational provision is available for all three- and four-year olds whose parents seek it. Approximately 76% of three-year olds and 95% of four-year olds attend classes in the early excellence centre and the 59 nursery units that are attached to primary schools. Coventry has 117 schools comprising; 86 primary schools, 19 secondary schools, 11 special schools and

one early years excellence centre. There are three pupil referral units comprising; a Key Stage 3 and assessment centre, a pregnant schoolgirl and mother unit and a medical recovery unit.

Eight schools have specialist status, including four for technology, one for arts, two for languages and one for maths and computing. Fourteen schools, including four secondary and ten primaries, are included in an Education Action Zone partnership. A further thirteen schools, including five secondary and eight primary schools are involved in an Excellence Cluster.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2003, gave the education service two stars (upper) for current performance and rated its capacity to improve as secure.

The performance of schools

The overall picture of pupils' performance in Coventry is mixed. Performance matches the national average in Key Stages 1 and 3 but is below average in Key Stages 2 and 4. Their performance is generally in line with that of similar authorities, except in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 3 English and mathematics, where it is above the average. Rates of improvement in national tests are broadly in line with national averages and those of similar authorities.

Attainment on entry to schools remains below the national average and the resources invested in early years education have yet to change this situation. However, pupils make gains in standards of reading and mathematics and by the end of Key Stage 1 their attainment in all tests at Level 2 and above is broadly in line with the national average. Performance at Key Stage 2 has fluctuated since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 and above was broadly in line with the national average in English in 2003, but was 3% below in mathematics and 2% below in science. Pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 is below national rates. At Key Stage 3 the proportions of 14-year-olds achieving Level 5 and above in English and mathematics have improved and are in line with national trends. Performance in science is below national averages. Pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 meets national rates. At Key Stage 4, despite steady increases in the proportion of pupils attaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, performance remains below national averages. Pupil's progress at Key Stage 4 is below national rates. The average points scores for pupils achieving two or more Advanced Level qualifications is in line with national average and above that of similar authorities.

The trend over three years shows the authority moving closer towards achieving the national floor targets at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in all schools, but progress has not been consistent year on year. Approximately seven primary schools in ten are achieving the minimum of 65% Level 4 and above. All but one secondary school has already achieved the 2004 target of 25% achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE.

The LEA has already reached its 2004 target of 38% of pupils achieving five A*-C grades. However, despite the progress in primary schools the authority missed its Key Stage 2 targets for English and mathematics. Recently agreed changes with the DfES now make the 2004 and 2005 targets more realisable.

The proportion of Coventry primary and secondary schools graded good or very good in Ofsted inspections is in line with similar LEAs, but is below the national average.

Attendance rates in primary and secondary schools have improved since the last inspection but remain below the national average. Permanent exclusions were well above national rates and those of similar LEAs in 2001. Extensive work has taken place and LEA data for 2002 show marked progress, reducing primary exclusions to 0.2, just under national rates, but secondary exclusions, at 3.4, remain above national rates.

Funding data for the LEA

Schools budget	Coventry	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary Average	England Average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2,714	2,645	2,623	2,708
Standards fund delegated	83	67	59	61
Education for under fives	50	73	62	96
Strategic management	33	33	33	29
Special educational needs	135	96	109	120
Grants	58	65	76	53
Access	42	66	53	55
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	14	18	24
Total schools budget	3,114	3,059	3,031	3,145
Schools formula spending share	2,801	2,872	2,812	2,904

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

LEA budget	Coventry	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary average	England average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	126	106	115	95
Specific Grants	4	14	12	16
Special educational needs	28	26	25	32
School improvement	54	31	34	36
Access	115	96	102	133
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	3	3	2
Youth and Community	103	77	70	74
Total LEA budget	430	353	362	388

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

Note: All figures are net

Notes