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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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BACKGROUND

1. This report details the findings of a short inspection conducted in May 2000 under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The purpose of the inspection, which was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, was to evaluate the progress made by the LEA in responding to the findings and recommendations of the previous inspection which took place in 1999.
2. This second inspection has followed up the progress of the LEA in implementing the post-inspection Action Plan and its Education Development Plan.
3. The inspection was carried out by a small team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in conjunction with the Audit Commission. Documentation provided by the LEA, including plans, reports and performance data, was scrutinised. Interviews were conducted with elected members, the Chief Executive and a member of his department, the executive director (education) and education officers, a representative of the Council's direct service organisation, diocesan officers, headteachers, governors, and the director of the Education Action Zone. Evidence was also drawn from recent monitoring visits to Barnsley schools by HMI. A questionnaire was sent to all the LEA's schools and the response rate was 79 per cent.

COMMENTARY

4. The 1999 inspection of Barnsley LEA showed it to have many serious problems that were preventing it from carrying out effectively its task of helping to improve standards in schools. These problems ranged across most aspects of its work, but difficulties in strategic management were fundamental, and there were also major issues to be tackled regarding its strategy for school improvement and its provision for pupils with special educational needs. Nevertheless, the report recognised that a sea-change had begun to take place, and it paid tribute to the new approach engendered by the political leadership and the recently appointed Chief Education Officer (now the executive director (education)).

5. This inspection considered progress made by the authority on the eleven groups of recommendations in the 1999 report. Our judgement is that after one year the LEA has made at least satisfactory progress in nine of these areas. Further work is needed in many detailed aspects, as this report goes on to indicate, but the corner has clearly been turned. Major strategic improvements have been made in most of the key functions, and a clear path has been charted for further improvement. Significant progress has been made in:

- revising the management structure of the LEA;
- consulting and communicating with schools;
- increasing spending on schools and targeting the deployment of the budget to meet priorities;
- the management of service provision to schools;
- enabling the inspection and advisory service to fulfil its role;
- improving particular aspects of work on school improvement;
- meeting statutory responsibilities on the curriculum;
- improving provision for pupils with special educational needs; and
- improving support for the education of children in public care.

In some cases the progress achieved has been greater than might have been expected after just one year.

6. The progress that has been made is sustainable because, rather than being an attempt at a series of quick fixes, it represents well thought-out change to the culture, organisation and practices of the LEA. Indeed, it is likely that further progress will be easier to achieve than that which has been achieved so far, because the LEA is now gaining some experience in its new way of doing things - working in partnership with schools and offering sound leadership where it is needed.

7. Progress has been insufficient overall in only two areas, although there have nevertheless been advances in certain aspects of each of them:

- revision of the Education Development Plan; and
- provision for behaviour support and education otherwise than at school.

With the first of these, significant improvements are still needed to the Education Development Plan to make it a more workable strategic planning document. With

the second, the LEA has not yet been able to relocate its pupil referral unit nor to plan a new structure for behaviour support and education otherwise than at school, and it must now make more rapid progress because its provision is still inadequate in some important respects.

8. In addition, this inspection evaluated the authority's progress on implementing the Education Development Plan. Work has been undertaken as planned on virtually all of the very many activities, although it is not possible yet to know what effect this has had on standards and quality in schools.

9. The overall improvement that has been achieved is attributable particularly to the leadership of the executive director (education), who has brought to bear clarity of thinking and a strong sense of purpose, and to the committed and spirited work of many officers. The new education strategic management team is working very positively. Good leadership has been provided by the Council's leader and senior elected members, and by the new Chief Executive. The funding of schools has been significantly improved, although the amount available is still not generous. A wider group of elected members is now enthusiastically involved in developments in education. The restructuring of the Council's strategic management has benefited the education service. Sound structures now link education to other Council departments and external partners. The restructuring of the education service has made it a more purposeful organisation than it used to be, and there is now a clearer rationale for work in school improvement and special educational needs. The successful establishment of the service quality monitoring group has been an important step forward. Overall, key aspects of the department's work are conducted with energy and skill.

10. The listing of these positive features should not be taken to imply that everything has suddenly improved, nor that everything is now undertaken successfully. In fact, the survey of schools made in January 2000 which informed this inspection indicated that the schools had little confidence then that much had improved at all. Indeed, there had been delay by the LEA in taking certain crucial steps forward: ten months passed after the first inspection before detailed restructure of the education directorate was agreed. This delayed overall improvement. The pace of developments has, however, speeded up in recent months as new appointees have taken up posts and the new structure of working groups has become established. Headteachers interviewed during this inspection generally had gained a greater confidence in the LEA's new ways of working, although they were well aware of what tasks still await the authority.

11. The authority does not generally produce impressive documentation about its aims and strategies. It has, rightly, been more concerned recently with action than with presentation, and the lack of strong documentation has not so far impeded its improvement process. However, as members and officers become able to take a more settled long-term view of their tasks, it will be necessary to improve the quality of written plans if these are to sustain complex and important policy developments.

12. Overall, the LEA has made significant strides towards becoming a satisfactory organisation. It has made good progress in one year and is now beginning to provide schools with the services they deserve. It would be unrealistic to expect this

to have had an immediate effect on pupils' standards of attainment, but the next task for the authority, as well as consolidating and extending the improvements made so far, is to ensure that its work does indeed have an impact on the low standards prevalent in many schools.

THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

Update

13. In nearly every respect the context of the authority remains broadly as it was at the time of the first inspection. There have been no major changes in the economic circumstances of Barnsley: it was 42nd overall in the 1998 national Index of Local Conditions which ranks deprivation in 354 local authorities. The district has a high unemployment rate. It is a relatively homogenous area whose heritage is mainly based on the coal mining industry. It is part of an area which has recently gained European Union Objective 1 status.

14. The LEA maintains two nursery schools, 87 primary schools, 14 secondary schools, three special schools and one Pupil Referral Unit. Two schools have achieved Beacon School status. A possible reorganisation of the special schools is currently under consideration.

15. Overall, the percentages of Barnsley primary and secondary schools considered by their OFSTED inspectors to be good or very good are below those in similar LEAs and below the national averages. One primary school has been removed from special measures since the previous LEA inspection, but a further primary school has been identified as requiring special measures. All but one of the twelve schools inspected in the last year had improved since their first inspection.

16. Pupils' attainment in the 1999 key stage tests was consistently below the national average, and at GCSE it was well below the average. The improvement in Barnsley from 1998 to 1999 was broadly similar to that seen nationally, except that it was better than the average rate of improvement at Key Stage 1 mathematics and Key Stage 3 English, and in the proportion of pupils achieving at least one GCSE. Primary school attendance figures dropped slightly in 1999 but secondary figures remained the same. Permanent exclusion figures are broadly in line with national figures.

17. Since the 1999 inspection, the previous system of Council programme areas has been replaced by distinct departments, of which education services is one. The Chief Education Officer has become executive director (education), a second tier post within the Council structure. The education strategic management team now comprises the executive director (education), assistant directors for community learning, policy and planning, pupil and family services, support services, and school effectiveness, with support from the communication and consultation manager.

SECTION 1: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The Council's strategy for education

18. The previous inspection report referred to the new direction and momentum then being provided for education by the Council's political leadership. It is very apparent that this has been continued and consolidated in the last year. Senior councillors make their commitment to education very clear, and this is expressed in the strong support given to the executive director (education) and her senior management team, the programme of increases in the funding of schools over a three year period, and the new emphasis on evaluation of the performance of services to schools. Detailed attention is given to these matters below.

19. Since the previous inspection the Council has made considerable progress in establishing its new democratic structure. The Council's lifelong learning scrutiny commission has emerged as a very active body. It meets frequently, is supported by its own advisers, and calls expert witnesses to its discussions. It has taken a prominent role in scrutinising draft Council policy, in monitoring progress on the Council's post-OFSTED action plan, and in joint work with another commission scrutinising provision for children in public care. The scrutiny commission has also begun to launch its own investigations. While it is too early to say whether this activity by the commission has led to improvements in school provision, it appears that it is providing stimulating debate on educational policy.

The post-OFSTED action plan

20. The authority recognised the severity of the criticisms made in the 1999 inspection report and designed a sound action plan to remedy the many failings identified. This took appropriate account of all of the report's recommendations and set out a series of actions to be undertaken in meeting them. The timescales established were generally reasonable, and the success criteria were fit for purpose.

21. In the event, the authority modified some aspects of its plan. This was generally sensible, and was done in the light of growing experience. In only rare instances would the authority have done better to stick to its original intentions.

22. The LEA set itself a demanding timescale, recognising the seriousness of the issues it had to tackle. However, progress was too slow in the first few months, while the Council made decisions about restructuring the management of education and the overall structure into which it fitted. Once this had been achieved, the rate of progress quickened. During the early stages of this period of improvement some key staff were working under considerable pressure, as many vacancies had to be covered by existing officers, and this situation is not entirely resolved as some vacancies have continued to exist (see paragraph 32 below).

23. The implementation of the plan was monitored by the executive director (education) who made clear reports to the political leadership on progress achieved and difficulties being experienced. The leader of the Council maintained a close watch on progress and has given considerable support to officers.

24. That the improvement process has been so successful overall, with progress being at least satisfactory in nine out of eleven recommendations, is due particularly to the leadership of the executive director (education), who has brought to bear clarity of thinking and purpose, and to the committed and energetic work of many officers.

Other relevant plans and strategies

25. It is clear that the Council sees improvements in lifelong learning as fundamental to its overriding aim of regenerating Barnsley, believing that the extent and seriousness of the district's economic problems can only be solved by a dramatic long term rise in standards of attainment, especially in the schools. The Council is a major contributor to the Barnsley Learning Partnership, one of four groups which are currently cooperating to produce an overall community plan for the Regeneration Forum. The Council leader chairs both the Regeneration Forum and the Learning Partnership, a sign of the significance given to the latter group. The Learning Partnership is better resourced than its predecessor body and appears to have a well organised structure of working groups. Its task is to identify growth points and target resources appropriately. The partnership recognises the need to support the LEA in its work in raising secondary school standards.

26. The LEA has a major role in developing the Barnsley Learning Net, an ICT grid which, it is planned, will connect all schools, libraries, and other community learning centres by 2002, thus increasing the opportunities for out-of-school learning as well as enhancing school provision. Progress towards this objective has been faster than projected and the LEA expects to achieve its target early. An imaginative and innovative Learning and Study Network is already developing which is likely to help many pupils across the district.

27. A further development since the previous inspection has been the Council's successful bid for government funding through the Ethnic Minorities and Traveller Achievement Grant. The LEA has rationalised its provision in order to maximise the use of slender resources, and is combining the previously separate service for Travellers into a unified cultural diversity service which will have responsibility for all minority ethnic support. This will give the authority the strategic ability to respond to changing needs, and particularly to develop provision for refugees or asylum seekers. However, the LEA will need to ensure that it retains the capacity within the overall project to maintain appropriate provision for all Traveller groups, and to continue to build long term liaison with the Traveller communities.

Management of functions

28. At the time of the previous inspection the LEA's management structure was ineffective. The then Chief Education Officer was a third tier officer, working within the education and leisure programme area. There was confusion about the relative roles of the Chief Education Officer and the programme area director. Budget and finance issues and the provision of a number of management support services for schools were dealt with by another third tier officer within the programme area rather than by the Chief Education Officer, as were issues such as the provision of school places and the maintenance of school property. Responsibility for certain major

educational plans, for instance coordination of the Education Development Plan (EDP), was also taken by another third tier officer within the programme area. Decisions on Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programmes with a bearing on education were taken in a different programme area altogether. Overall, the 1999 inspection found these arrangements complicated and inefficient. They did not promote coherent management of key functions such as support for school improvement or the presentation of services to schools. Moreover, the structure failed to lead to good strategic work with social services, and liaison with partners was not well managed. Other factors impeding the authority's management of its functions at the time of the previous inspection were the significant loss of posts that had taken place in some key educational services, and the range of staff vacancies that had occurred.

29. The first report on Barnsley LEA included the following recommendation:

(A) To improve the management of its functions the LEA should:

- i) establish definitively the management control of the CEO so that she is in a position to focus the work of all school-related services on common purposes and within common management patterns and timescales;*
- ii) give her responsibility for liaison with relevant services and agencies, in particular social services;*
- iii) ensure that expenditure on management is sufficient and effectively employed to enable good use of what the LEA's services provide.*

30. The LEA has now made sound progress in response to these recommendations, although there was unnecessary delay in the first instance because the authority decided to link the changes required in education to an overall review of the Council's senior management structure, thus delaying the implementation of many initiatives.

31. The Council decided to abandon the programme area system, and instead to create six second tier executive director posts, of which the executive director (education) post, covering all matters germane to education, was one. The existing Chief Education Officer became executive director (education) designate six months after the publication of OFSTED's report. However, in fact she had been given clear personal responsibility for education only two months after the inspection when she assumed acting command of the then programme area. At that time the authority rightly ensured that she did not become diverted into non-educational work within the programme area by creating a temporary arrangement for managing these responsibilities. Overall, it is now completely clear that the executive director (education) is in charge of the management of the full range of the authority's education service and responsible for its Education Development Plan. Other structural changes have supported this: SRB work in education is now line managed within education services; the executive director (education) attends regular meetings of the heads of agencies; she is a key member of the Barnsley Learning Partnership; co-ordination of the lifelong learning plan is now undertaken within the education directorate.

32. Following the senior management restructure, the Council embarked on restructuring other posts in each service. An unfortunate side effect of linking the education directorate restructuring with the wider Council exercise was a significant delay in filling a range of key education posts. Ten months passed after the first inspection before a detailed restructure of the education directorate was agreed by members. This had the effect of continuing the difficulties in staffing which had been a key factor in the service problems previously. However, to its credit, and with the support of the new Chief Executive, after the initial period when improvement in education was hampered by the wider structural issues, the Council gave precedence to restructuring education. A sound new structure has now been created, establishing an education senior management team with a good balance of responsibilities. Middle management posts have been restructured and some appropriate new posts created. At the time of this inspection the following posts, amongst others, were vacant: two professional managerial posts and two administrative posts within policy and planning; three finance officer posts; two ICT development officer posts and five ICT technician posts. It was anticipated, though, that these posts would shortly be filled. The adviser posts for English and mathematics were vacant until recently. The authority has had to delay acting on some aspects of the OFSTED recommendations until it has had all its new staff in place.

33. The authority wisely took the opportunity of the restructure to increase the management capacity of the education directorate. The current year's budget includes growth of £170,000 in expenditure on management posts within the education department. Whether this proves to be sufficient to meet all the demands on the LEA remains to be seen, and the Council will need to ensure that its large-scale plans for the Learning Partnership do not over-burden the department. The LEA's spending under the "statutory and regulatory duties" heading in 1999/2000 was well below the average for similar authorities and, despite the growth agreed, seems very likely to remain so in the current year [figures for other LEAs for 2000/2001 are not yet available]. The LEA has, not unreasonably, taken the view that, before agreeing further increases, it wishes to review the effectiveness of the department following the completion of its restructuring and the filling of all the posts involved. The possibility that further adjustments in the staffing establishment may be necessary is reflected in the LEA's outline investment plan. However, the spend on school improvement is already very high: £47 per pupil in 1999/2000, whereas the average figure for metropolitan districts was £20. This is currently justified in the short term by the crucial work that faces the LEA, but the balance between centrally retained and delegated funding for school improvement may need reconsideration in the longer term.

34. Although the process of restructuring has been time-consuming the outcome is good. The executive director (education) now heads a vigorous and purposeful service, the shape of which is well matched to needs. Some useful new posts have been created at appropriate levels. It is too early to determine whether this major change at the centre is leading to greater effectiveness of schools, but it has certainly made the LEA better organised and more able to lead and to respond. The Council, however, has not yet caught up entirely with its own changes as the scheme for delegation still refers to the previous system.

35. There are indications that the restructure, and the efforts of the education directorate and its partners, have promoted inter-departmental developments. Education and social services have begun to think constructively about developments in multi-disciplinary service work with vulnerable children and families, and meetings of heads of agencies make continued collaboration feasible. Strategic cooperation between education and social services is developing soundly: there is good cooperation between the directors, their management teams meet regularly, and social services staff have been involved in working on the revision of the EDP. The directors report that being able to control their own budgets, which previously were contained within programme areas, has enabled them to promote co-operative developments better. The school survey undertaken for this inspection showed that schools have not yet seen much improvement on the ground in liaison between education and social services, but the evidence of the inspection indicates that the crucial step of planning developments, at least, has been taken successfully.

Consultation and communication

36. At the time of the 1999 inspection the authority's consultation with its schools was generally too rushed, put too heavy a load on headteachers and threatened to swamp governing body meetings. There was also a tendency for it to be more concerned with providing information than about developing policy. The report therefore recommended that:

(B) In order to improve its consultation and communication with schools the LEA should:

- i) identify a sequence of development and debate covering fundamental issues such as funding and school improvement;*
- ii) rationalise consultation on other topics so that the burden on schools is reduced, while securing their proper involvement;*
- Jv) help governing bodies to focus more on the specific needs of their schools rather than on LEA business.*

37. Since the inspection the LEA has taken firm action. A management post has been created for consultation and communication. Good efforts have been made to systematise communications to schools in order that essential information is provided clearly and usefully, and non-essential documentation is eliminated. Similarly, all consultation is channelled through specific groups. Nine forums, including headteacher representatives, have been established to advise lead officers on policy development in particular aspects, and the executive director (education) leads an overall strategy forum to which all headteachers are invited. Some groups also include other partners, such as the TEC. All headteachers receive a short summary of the work of each of these groups termly, and more detailed briefings are distributed as appropriate. The authority has also taken steps to encourage governing bodies to take greater control of their business. The influence of the LEA on the agendas of governing body meetings has been reduced as it now provides fewer briefing materials and makes them more timely. Governors interviewed during the inspection indicated that these changes had enabled their governing bodies to focus on their own school's development. The authority has refined its

consultation of governors: attention is now given more selectively to important matters.

38. The survey of schools was undertaken for this inspection in January 2000. The results indicated that, overall, at that time schools thought there had been no improvement in consultation. This may be partly because the forum system was very new and had got off to an unhappy start, with some overlap between it and specific consultation then underway. There was also some confusion about the roles of forum members. However, a significant number of written comments with the survey returns referred to a trend of improvement in the LEA's consultation, and a group of headteachers interviewed several months later had a generally more favourable view. They tended to believe that the authority had become more open to discussion, and that work in at least some of the forums is proving auspicious as key issues are being discussed. There is therefore some evidence, albeit insubstantial, that the LEA's new, disciplined system is beginning to work. It has so far involved a considerable amount of officer time, and initially officers had to prepare a large number of items for consultation because a large backlog had developed. The LEA wisely hopes to rationalise the system in due course as major issues are resolved in turn. In general, then, the major improvements in the LEA's approach to schools which were signalled in the previous inspection report have continued to develop. Headteachers and governors tend now to trust and respect officers, and value the LEA's leadership.

Resources and Fair Funding

39. The first inspection found that the LEA was spending below Education SSA. However, it showed that increases in the SSA in the previous two years had been passported in full and that spending on education had increased at a significantly faster rate than on the remainder of services provided by the Council, which had been substantially cut in real terms. Spending on primary and secondary schools overall was broadly comparable with that of other authorities, but the proportion of the education budget delegated to schools was relatively low. Centrally controlled spending on management and administration was significantly lower than the average for similar authorities. The LEA's formula for delegating funding to schools was not underpinned by an up-to-date model of educational activity at school level. These findings were reflected in recommendations that the LEA should:

A iii) ensure that expenditure on management is sufficient and effectively employed to enable good use of what the LEA's services provide;

C i) [in order to produce a fair and sound basis for the funding of schools] in close discussion with schools move towards a clearly specified model of educational activity;

D i) firmly embrace the principle that schools should decide which services they want to buy in;

D iii) consider closely the balance of expenditure between the different elements of centrally-retained funding.

40. The LEA has made reasonable progress overall on these recommendations, although further work is still needed concerning formula funding.

41. The LEA's budget for the current year reflects a continuing high priority for education spending. The increase in Education SSA was again passported in full, and some further growth agreed, thus making inroads into the gap, previously £2.7m, between spending and the SSA. At the same time there were cuts in real terms elsewhere in the Council's budget. Furthermore, the LEA has made a commitment to passporting Education SSA increases in full for the coming two years, plus continuing to close the gap between spend and SSA by a minimum of £0.25m each year.

42. The education budget for the current year also includes some significant redistribution of funding. More money is being delegated to schools and directed into other direct service provision to them. The LEA has also developed an outline investment plan for future years although this has not been costed in full, nor have the sources of the funding required been identified. This is substantial and likely to be well in excess of the LEA's ability to meet through funding growth alone. Therefore, a further review of the distribution of existing resources will be necessary. The LEA has nonetheless made some reasonable progress already on meeting the relevant recommendation (Diii).

43. Because the LEA had hitherto retained control of a relatively high proportion of spending on schools, substantial sums had to be delegated this year to meet the requirements of the Fair Funding legislation. Whilst this was undertaken as required, in the budgetary areas where the LEA retained discretion on delegation relatively little was included. As such, in these areas the LEA has yet to make major progress in allowing schools greater scope for deciding what services they wish to buy. This having been said, the LEA met the Government's target for delegation in the current year and plans significant further delegation in 2001/2002. A legitimate consideration for the authority in deciding not to delegate funding for support for SEN statements in 2000/01 was that senior managers were not in post with sufficient time to address the significant personnel implications involved.

44. The LEA convened a number of working groups with headteacher representatives during the Summer and Autumn terms last year to review its funding formula, with the aim of tying it to a clearly specified model of educational activity. A great deal of hard work was put into this process but insufficient time and staffing resources were allowed for the task. Some useful progress was made in identifying key issues and the analysis undertaken was helpful in guiding the distribution of growth in the Individual Schools Budget for the current year, which was weighted in favour of the primary sector. However, further work is still required and the LEA has committed itself to undertake this during the coming year and beyond. It will be important to ensure that both the time allowed and the resources provided are sufficient to avoid the same problems recurring.

Service planning, specification and evaluation

45. The first inspection found that neither services provided to education by other Council departments nor those provided to schools by the education department from centrally controlled expenditure were subject to service level agreements (SLAs), or any other clear specifications of service entitlement and cost. There was also no tradition of working closely with schools on support service priorities, on the monitoring and evaluation of service delivery, and on service planning and development. This did not help in ensuring accountability for service provision, in facilitating consideration of value for money, and in developing services which were responsive to schools' changing needs. Therefore the report recommended that the LEA should:

- D ii) a) develop service level agreements for all services, within both Education and other departments, which are funded centrally; b) ensure that agreements for services sold to schools are detailed and precise and include a reasonable range of options for schools to choose amongst;*
- D iv) involve school representatives more routinely in the review and development of support services and inform schools well in advance of planned changes;*
- B iii) test and, where necessary, improve the speed and quality of responses by Council services to enquiries from schools.*

46. The LEA has taken useful first steps towards meeting these recommendations but further work is required. Progress during the year has been reasonable overall, given the size of the task facing the authority.

47. During the last year SLAs have been developed for all the services provided to education by other Council departments. These became operational at the start of the current financial year. Charges to the education budget now reasonably reflect in each case the volume of service provided.

48. The introduction of SLAs for the centrally funded services to schools has, however, been delayed until next year. This is because the LEA considered it a higher priority to concentrate on developing the SLAs for services being offered on a traded basis for the first time this year. Since there were a relatively large number of these in Barnsley, because of limited delegation in the past, and the move to SLAs represented a major culture change for the LEA, a decision to prioritise is understandable. Given that a choice had to be made, the concentration on traded services was reasonable. Reasonably detailed descriptions of each centrally funded service have been produced for the current year, displayed alongside the total cost involved. These fall well short of being SLAs, but represent some progress in providing a platform for the assessment of performance and value for money.

49. The SLAs for traded services in the current year are an acceptable first step towards providing schools with detailed and precise service specifications and a reasonable choice of service offer. They were developed by working groups which included headteacher representatives. As with the groups which reviewed the funding formula, more time and staffing resources to undertake research and analysis prior to the meetings would have been beneficial. The SLAs are not yet

satisfactory, particularly because they do not yet provide sufficiently detailed specifications of service level and performance, nor establish appropriate arrangements for the settlement of disputes.

50. The choice of services currently offered to schools for purchase is insufficient. At present most services offer a single all-embracing subscription package, with an indication, in general terms only, that 'buy as you need' arrangements could be made available by negotiation. Additionally, the explanatory material provided is insufficiently clear about the continuing obligations of schools which choose not to buy the services, for instance to provide the authority with certain information. The provision of clear guidance of this kind would equip schools to make a properly informed judgement and avoid any impression that the LEA is trying to keep schools 'tied' to its services.

51. It is clear that the LEA wishes to work collaboratively with schools to ensure that both services offer and performance meet their developing needs. The role of the service quality monitoring group is crucial, and its establishment marks a cultural change for the LEA. It is to establish standards for the development of individual service SLAs, ensure a common format and publication schedule for marketing material, and coordinate the development of the LEA's overall package of services to meet schools' changing requirements. The group will develop a list of performance indicators covering all aspects of LEA activity, and devise a common format for evaluation reports to be considered by itself, the education strategic management team, and elected members. It will also oversee the issue of an annual evaluation questionnaire to schools, and advise on Best Value reviews. Good work has already been done in surveying schools' satisfaction with the speed of service response and in improving both the speed and quality of communication with schools.

52. The work of developing individual services and their SLAs will be undertaken by service managers in consultation with the relevant consultation forum. For example, the resources strategy group will advise on the development of a range of management support services such as personnel and finance. It will be important for the LEA to make clear who is responsible for service monitoring, review, and development. These activities are clearly closely linked and there is some potential in the existing framework of groups for confusion and the duplication of effort.

Property management

53. The first inspection found that the maintenance of school buildings was unsatisfactory, although the LEA had been able to recover some ground recently. This was primarily because levels of investment over a long period had been inadequate. Schools also expressed some doubts over the value for money of services provided by the Council's building works organisation. The report recommended that the LEA should:

C ii) review its allocation of spending on the maintenance and improvement of school buildings with a view to increasing it;

iii) review the contract for school maintenance work with the Council's direct service organisation to ensure that it is providing best value for schools.

54. The LEA has made satisfactory progress on these recommendations.

55. The LEA has taken significant steps in increasing spending on the repair, maintenance, and improvement of school buildings. The revenue funding delegated to schools for repairs and maintenance has been increased by over 60 per cent in the current year and capital spending by the LEA has increased by 30 per cent. Since the previous year's capital figure was nearly 50 per cent above the average for other metropolitan districts, the current level of spending is likely to continue to compare very favourably indeed with the average. Officers now consider that some worthwhile inroads are being made into the backlog of repairs. The LEA is on schedule to meet the Government's asset management planning requirements.

56. The LEA has also taken significant steps to review the contract with the Council's direct service organisation (DSO) to ensure that value for money is received for expenditure on repairs and maintenance. The contract with the DSO, under which it undertook all revenue funded maintenance work and capital works up to £100,000 in value, has ended and not been renewed. The DSO is now used for works up to £1,000 in value and all those beyond this value are put out to tender. This arrangement will run for the current financial year only, allowing some time for potential alternative providers of services up to £1,000 in value to develop their offer.

57. Discussions are now taking place with other potential providers as part of a Best Value review of school maintenance. The review is scheduled for completion before the end of the current financial year and is intended to inform the arrangements to replace the current contract with the DSO. The activity planned to meet the 'Four Cs' requirements of Best Value review is appropriate, as are the arrangements for managing the review process. The review will have the benefit of work being undertaken elsewhere in the Council, in particular on its housing maintenance function.

Recommendations

In order to regularise its delegation of powers, the Council should:

- revise its scheme for delegation to bring it into line with the recent management restructuring.

In order to ensure that the strategic links now established between education and social services bear fruit, the Chief Executive should:

- monitor regularly the outcomes of strategic co-operation between education and social services to ensure that this is leading to improved cooperation in front line services.

In order to ensure that the authority now has adequate management capacity, the Chief Executive should:

- ensure that this is reviewed within the next two years.

In order to ensure that consultation on the funding formula is effective, senior managers should:

- ensure that both the time allowed for further work on reviewing the funding formula and the resources provided to support the process are sufficient.

In order to establish SLAs which are beneficial to schools:

- SLAs for services sold to schools should be developed to: provide more detailed specifications of service level and performance, establish arrangements for the settlement of disputes, provide greater choice, and improve information on requirements for schools not buying the LEA service.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The strategy for school improvement

58. The previous inspection found that the LEA's planning for school improvement had improved considerably during 1997/8 but that it needed rethinking in some aspects, and the relationships between various plans needed establishing. The report recommended that:

(H) To secure effective implementation of its approach to school improvement the LEA should:

- i) set out in detail the relationship between work within the Education Development Plan and other activities, including those within Single Regeneration Budget programmes, the Education Action Zone, and the Barnsley Education Partnership Plan;*
- ii) ensure that the management of work within the Education Action Zone and Single Regeneration Budget programmes is consistent with that of other improvement activities.*

59. The LEA has made varying progress on different aspects of this recommendation and further work is required to implement it thoroughly.

60. The Council has refined its processes regarding bidding for and managing grant-funded work. All such work is now overseen by the regeneration forum, chaired by the Council leader, and bids are made by the goal groups (such as the Learning Partnership) according to strategic documents which define local needs. The executive director (education) attends relevant meetings of the forum executive to give advice on educational matters. The system is therefore designed to ensure that specialist knowledge is brought to bear on potential bids as appropriate.

61. Equally significantly, greater clarity of responsibility for school improvement activity was achieved soon after the previous inspection when all grant-funded educational work was brought under the management of the executive director (education). Potential educational bids are considered by the education strategic management team and these projects are now line managed within the education directorate, with the involvement of partners. Although the Chief Executive's department maintains an appraisal of all SRB work, *de facto* management of these projects lies with the education directorate. Managers of the various projects meet regularly with LEA advisers to form policy and to discuss the interface with schools. The school effectiveness team intends to take a greater role in developing these projects and in preparing their exit strategies. This clearer co-ordination and planning represents reasonable progress since the inspection.

62. Liaison with the Education Action Zone has also developed since the inspection as the Zone has matured and the LEA has improved. Senior officers meet frequently to discuss strategy. The two organisations are now in a better position to discuss the effectiveness of Zone and LEA initiatives. However, it took some time for regular communication to develop between the LEA's advisers and the Zone's team leaders about the full nature of Zone activity and its targeting of resources. There is evidence that some schools within the Zone need more guidance in focusing clearly

on the initiatives that most closely match their priorities. This is now more likely to happen as it is envisaged that LEA advisers and Zone leaders will meet soon to discuss the programme of support for each school.

63. The Zone's activities are intended to supplement the LEA's EDP work. In some cases the additionality this provides is clear, as in the case of developments in ICT, albeit that significant problems of implementation were experienced in the first year. There has been good partnership work on primary literacy and some innovative joint activity has been undertaken. However, the LEA's EDP priority for support for school management is not yet reflected substantially in the Zone's activities, nor has the Zone so far given particular support to teaching and learning in the core subjects at secondary schools, even though this is an important aspect of the EDP. As yet there is no robust mechanism for disseminating good practice from the Zone across the LEA.

64. In accordance with government policy the Zone has established targets for improvement in core subjects and at GCSE which are more ambitious than those of the whole LEA. However, there has been some confusion within particular schools about the significance for them of the LEA's and the Zone's targets, and it is reported that certain schools have ended up with two targets for different administrative purposes.

65. The LEA has not made enough progress in ensuring that all schools are aware of the range of improvement projects which operate in Barnsley. Unfortunately it abandoned its plan to produce a synoptic booklet but informs schools through briefing letters describing each new project. The link adviser is expected to discuss with each school the appropriateness of each project. Nevertheless, schools would be likely to benefit from a unified description of what is available and on what terms access to provision can be achieved. It is clear from interviews during this inspection that, although there have been improvements in information provision, many headteachers still feel the need for presentation of a single strategic overview of provision within the EDP, the SRB and the EAZ.

The role of the school effectiveness team

66. At the time of the previous inspection, the school effectiveness team was still in the process of formation. Its predecessor, the advisory and inspection service had, for some time, suffered from discontinuity in management and staffing, and from an involvement in inspection outside the LEA that left it with too little time to work within Barnsley itself. Management systems had fallen into disuse, or non-existence, so that advisers' activity tended to be *ad hoc* and of inconsistent quality. Some good work was done, but overall the service knew too little about the schools to target its work effectively, and had not made a sufficient impact on standards, particularly in secondary schools. A recently appointed chief adviser had instituted a new regime of visits to schools by link advisers, and that system was showing promise. Aspects of it, however, had not been fully thought through. The report therefore recommended the LEA should:

(1)(i) (a) review the impact of the work done to date within the new approach to school development, (b) ensure its rigour and consistency, (c) take further

steps to improve schools' capacity to evaluate their own work and (d) clarify the basis for the differential allocation of assistance to schools;

- (ii) put into place effective management routines to govern the work of the service;*
- (iii) provide or secure for schools adequate challenge and support on the curriculum, teaching, school planning and management;*
- (iv) ensure that the curriculum support work of the Performing Arts Development Service (PADS) is consistent with the approach taken on other subjects.*

67. The LEA has made good progress in response to these recommendations. The chief adviser and her senior colleagues have provided good leadership and, although it is too soon to discern any great impact on standards of attainment, the team is winning the respect of schools, and has greatly improved the consistency and rigour of its work. The extent of the progress made is not fully reflected in the documentation the team provides to schools, however, and one immediate recommendation is that the team should seek to ensure that the quality of what it writes matches the quality of its thinking.

68. Greater consistency in the work of link advisers especially has been achieved through:

- serious attention to recruitment, including re-advertisements of several posts which did not initially attract suitable candidates;
- effective induction, including joint visiting and one to one coaching;
- a detailed needs audit followed by appropriate training;
- regular review of work at line management meetings;
- careful recording and analysis of advisory work;
- quality assurance of notes of visit;
- collection of the views of the schools; and
- inclusion of PADS within all these systems.

69. It has taken some time to put all this in place, to build a team out of a collection of individuals recruited from a variety of sources and to modify attitudes in schools many of whom were not accustomed to challenge, or even interest, from the advisory service. The notion of challenge is well understood: the team believes that it should persuade schools that they can do better, and should equip them with the analytical tools, or support, to arrive at effective strategies. The team provided numerous examples of challenging work with schools and the heads we interviewed confirmed that they welcomed the new approach because they recognised the need to raise standards. It is therefore essential that the work of the team should focus more explicitly on standards. At present, some of the advisory case studies make an optimistic assumption that improving processes will inevitably lead to higher standards of attainment.

70. The distinction between monitoring and support is also unclear, partly because the LEA assumes that it needs to visit all its schools regularly in order to meet its statutory requirements. It has, however, sensibly reduced the volume of this routine visiting and intends to direct it entirely to identified need as it becomes clearer about which of its schools can support their own improvement.

71. The LEA now places great stress on enhancing schools' capacity for self-evaluation as a means to secure continuous improvement. It makes use of a self-evaluation pack which is closely aligned to OFSTED criteria. This requires the school to make judgements of the quality of aspects of its work. However, it does not guarantee that improvement activity will take place. The setting of strategies for improvement is supported by link adviser visits, particularly those which deal with target-setting. The links between the two processes – self-evaluation and target-setting – are not clearly explained or widely understood, and some headteachers question whether the team has the capacity to support the processes in secondary schools. In fairness, though, it should be said that the team is not reliant and does not expect schools to rely, wholly on its own resources. It has links with external consultants and a range of higher education providers.

72. Following self-evaluation and agreement with link advisers, schools place themselves into one of seven categories of management capacity. The key issue is the extent to which they are capable of improving autonomously. That determines the degree of intervention required from the authority and therefore underpins the targeting of the team's resources. However, the methodology does not define management processes, set out any numerical triggers, define the support allocated to each category, or clarify the LEA's statutory powers and who will exercise them. Furthermore, the categories need to be revisited because the distinctions between the higher categories are too small.

73. Overall then, the management of the school effectiveness team has improved more than could reasonably have been hoped and, if there are weaknesses in its work, that is partly because it has rightly set out to be very ambitious.

The Education Development Plan

74. The authority's Education Development Plan (EDP) has six priorities for improvement: literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), science, effective management, and improving the quality of education in schools where there are weaknesses. These priorities continue to be as relevant to Barnsley schools' needs as when the plan was originated. The previous inspection report noted the strengths of the EDP: its thorough audit of need; its appropriate approach to school improvement; and its reasonable overall costs. The report, however, also identified the plan's weaknesses: the action plans were of variable precision and usefulness and some had success criteria that were too broad; and the monitoring and evaluation process was over-complicated. Accordingly, the report recommended that the LEA should:

(Hiii) overhaul the action plans set out in the Education Development Plan so that (a) all meet same standard of clarity and logic in their staging (b) the implementation of the programmes differentiates between schools' needs and (c) continuity between work in different phases is secured.

75. The current inspection showed that the authority has made some improvements, but these are insufficient. Its update of the audit of provision and needs refers to some new factors and this has led to some appropriate changes in the activities planned. Account has been taken of an analysis of schools' own development plans.

The action plans include some greater detail on target groups of teachers, and in some cases demonstrate a clearer staging of activities allowing the authority to meet different needs in a more timely fashion. The LEA has now charted schools' uptake of EDP activities, and keeps a record of advisory time devoted to each priority.

76. However, overall, there are still significant weaknesses which prevent the EDP becoming a powerful means through which the LEA can plan progress. The target groups are still sometimes expressed too generally. The success criteria for activities are still sometimes too vague. The fact that resourcing is no longer shown against the activities, but set out in a separate document, makes it a less useful planning tool. It is not always clear how a school will gain access to the activities and schools might therefore become too dependent on the link adviser interpreting the plan for them. All in all, the modifications made to the plan since the previous inspection have taken it in the right direction but have not gone far enough. The plan is therefore due for a more radical overhaul, which the LEA itself currently intends and for which it will be well prepared by its current work gathering information from various sources on the evolving needs of schools.

Implementation of the Education Development Plan

77. Barnsley's EDP contains a very large number of activities. Nevertheless, the authority has been successful in mounting almost all of these as planned during the first year of implementation. This represents a high level of activity by the school effectiveness team and a range of partners.

78. Interviews during this inspection showed that advisers responsible for implementing EDP priorities have a good knowledge of progress in the work for which they are responsible. An appropriate record has been kept of activities undertaken, and in many cases interim evaluations are available to show the extent of the LEA's inputs and the initial response of schools. This process is not yet fully systematic, not surprisingly given the vacancies that have affected the advisory team in the past. However, it augurs well for the future.

Priority 1: Support for literacy

79. Support for literacy is also the subject of recommendations in the first OFSTED report: that the LEA should:

- (Ji) (a) provide continuing support for schools as they implement the National Literacy Strategy and (b) ensure that link advisers play their part in monitoring and evaluating schools' work in the field;*
- ii) produce and implement a convincing plan to raise literacy standards in secondary schools.*

80. The LEA has responded satisfactorily to the recommendations. Despite written planning which is of variable - but often poor - quality, it has maintained both the quality and the quantity of its support to schools. By the end of next year, two thirds of all schools in the LEA will have received intensive support and all other schools will have had at least one day of consultancy support. That support consists of

detailed and helpful diagnosis, high quality work in schools and effective guidance. Evaluation of training courses has been largely positive.

81. The LEA does not yet have a convincing written plan to raise literacy standards in secondary schools, but it has done some of the necessary groundwork, and has undertaken some useful work in particular schools. For example, a report by a consultant has mapped Key Stage 3 provision across the LEA as a basis for the newly appointed English adviser to work on. She will be able to give full attention to the development of Key Stage 3 and the consultant's report strongly suggests that the time is ripe for coordination of somewhat disconnected initiatives. To date, the consultant has supported particular schools through well-received whole staff INSET. In one school, two teachers attended the five-day National Literacy Strategy (NLS) training and have subsequently worked on a whole school development plan. Work has also been done on supporting the development of literacy through history.

82. More broadly, in relation to progress on the EDP priority, management of the NLS has undergone considerable change, but is now stabilised. The changes have not yet affected standards – although an acceleration in the rate of improvement is certainly needed. The LEA has conducted an extensive analysis of why improvement has not been more rapid, as a result of which it has begun to intensify its support for writing, through tailored intervention in all schools, not only the intensive cohort. Work on the under-achievement of boys is now beginning, although rather late in the day. Two schools are involved in a pilot and one of the consultants is preparing to undertake further work, informed by academic research.

83. Link advisers have received extensive training, and are subject to a precise performance management regime. This ensures that their support for target setting is effective, and that they can give broadly helpful advice on generic management issues. The training is not, of course, intended to ensure that link advisers have the specialist capacity for detailed diagnosis that is properly the province of the consultants. It does, however, more than in most LEAs, equip them to provide effective support to the implementation of the strategy through the analytical and well-informed advice they give to schools.

84. Overall, despite some difficulties, the implementation of the EDP priority is satisfactory.

Priority 2: Support for Numeracy

85. Support for numeracy is also the subject of a recommendation in the first OFSTED report: that the LEA should:

(Jiii) equip itself with the capacity to work effectively with secondary schools to improve standards in numeracy.

86. The LEA has responded well to this recommendation. It has not attempted to produce a written plan of any weight. It has, however, mounted a series of effective and well targeted initiatives, devised in the light of good performance information. Advisory support for Key Stage 3 is generally satisfactory and improving. It is further reinforced by a framework for mathematics at KS3, guidance on numeracy across

the curriculum and, in order to tackle the problem of transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, a package of Year 7 lessons. Subject networks have been established, and secondary heads of department persuaded to adopt an overall GCSE target of 50 per cent grades A* - C.

87. The school effectiveness team has conducted reviews of secondary departments. These are searching, but would be more so if they more precisely defined the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' mathematical knowledge, identified the reasons for any deficiencies, and defined clear implications for changes in curriculum, assessment, resources and pedagogy. At present, observations on process are often acute, but not explicitly linked to standards. Since this is also the key defect in school management, the necessary refocusing is not large, but it is absolutely critical.

88. More broadly, the LEA's support for numeracy, despite changes in management and a lengthy delay in appointing a mathematics adviser, is strong. Progress against EDP targets is effectively supported by guidance, consultancy and training. Its implementation of the EDP priority is satisfactory. The authority has, nevertheless, had some difficulty in persuading its primary schools to be appropriately ambitious in setting targets, although a shortfall in aggregated targets of four per cent has now been effectively addressed. The LEA has persuaded its schools that pupils achieving level 2b at Key Stage 1 should normally achieve level 4 and it has also devised strategies, with some schools, to raise the attainment even of some who scored less well.

Priority 3: Support for ICT

89. This priority has three key component parts: improving school management, improving the quality of teaching, and raising pupil achievement. Relatively few changes have been made to the action plan since the last inspection, the main one being to give greater emphasis to outcomes in terms of pupil achievement, as opposed to process in terms of teacher activity. This change strengthens the plan slightly in terms of success criteria but further refinement is needed.

90. Progress in implementing the ICT action plan has been good. In a number of cases the LEA is ahead both of its own target dates and progress in most other LEAs. The technical difficulties which gave the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) programme an unhappy first six months in Barnsley have been overcome. Training follow-up for NGfL installation as well as activity within other national projects has been prompt. Good progress has also been made on establishing the framework for the Barnsley Intranet. A range of advisers and consultative groups has been given the brief of developing its contents. The key task now is to satisfy the considerable enthusiasm of schools for material across a wide range of curriculum areas to be included with minimum delay.

91. This last point is characteristic more generally of the development of support for ICT. Substantial progress has been made in establishing hardware and software frameworks, as well as in revising and strengthening training provision and other support. However, some key aspects of support for schools have been strengthened only recently, and schools may not yet have fully exploited the new provision. This

may well be why a number of questions concerning ICT support produced relatively poor scores in the school survey. The LEA nonetheless needs to monitor closely the developing impact of the new provision on management, teaching, and learning. The monitoring and evaluation arrangements set out in the EDP are appropriate for the task, although the success criteria are often framed in very general terms and may well prove difficult to use in practice.

Priority 4: Support for science

92. This priority is concerned with introducing a programme of cognitive acceleration in science, improving the quality of teaching by improving teachers' knowledge and understanding at Key Stages 1,2 and 3, improving the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, and improving the quality of management of secondary school science departments. Only the first of these activities has yet been begun; the others are scheduled to start next year.

93. The activity plans have been sharpened up considerably since the first version of the plan. Nevertheless, in one instance the success criteria are still somewhat unreliable, and in another activity there is a possibility of confusion between the needs of two different secondary target groups.

94. Implementation of the first activity has been on schedule. A project coordinator is now working with teachers in a group of schools in conjunction with a university department. The LEA appears to be making very sound and appropriate use of the national project, and its management of this activity is very secure. A good number of teachers have now been trained so that they can introduce the project in their schools.

Priority 5: Support for effective school management

95. The activities within this priority cover a very great range of work and evaluation by the LEA of work done in the first year has led to some useful modifications to the plan. Some of the revised activity plans are clear and purposeful, but the plan concerning social inclusion is still poorly expressed.

96. Despite the imperfections in the written document, the authority has successfully launched all of the activities planned in the first version of the EDP except one, which was rendered inappropriate by national changes. Evaluations by schools of the activities undertaken have generally been positive.

Priority 6: Support for schools causing concern

97. Support for schools in special measures and in serious weaknesses was judged, at the time of the first OFSTED inspection, to be variable, but overall broadly satisfactory. No recommendations were made in this area.

98. Support for weaker schools is the subject of priority six in the EDP, and activity 11 in priority five. As often in Barnsley, the practice is much better than the written planning. EDP priority six, for example, is an ill-assorted collection of ill-defined activities, several of which, at the level indicated, are unlikely to have much effect.

The written policy for identifying and working with schools causing concern, moreover, is no more than a statement of principle.

99. Fortunately, poor planning does not, in this instance, impede shared understanding and effective action, which has - as advisory personnel have taken up post - become increasingly more co-ordinated. Overall, progress on this priority has been satisfactory. When a school is identified, either by OFSTED or by the LEA, as being in difficulties, the link adviser co-ordinates action and action planning with the chief and senior advisers. Action plans are regularly reviewed, and have occasionally needed amendment. Action itself has usually been appropriate, and has included tough measures.

100. Nevertheless, the LEA's support can appear *ad hoc* because it lacks a good written policy. The LEA has not made a clear statement to schools of its powers of intervention and how it proposes to exercise them, setting clear numerical triggers for levels of concern, aligning differentiated levels of intervention to those levels of concern, with costings and means of evaluation and review.

The management of literacy and numeracy

101. The strategic oversight of both the NLS and the National Numeracy Strategy is vested in a senior adviser. There is much to be said for this in principle, since the management of the two strategies clearly has much in common. In practice, though much of the written planning is thin, there are clear understandings and a sense of purpose at all levels of the strategy. Guidance, training and consultancy work are of good quality. The strategic oversight of support for literacy, as of numeracy, is, however, rather tightly contained within the school effectiveness team. Given that both strategies are obviously essential to the regeneration of the borough, there may be a need for oversight to be more broadly vested, including a broader range of stakeholders.

Curriculum responsibilities

102. The first OFSTED report made a group of recommendations which fell outside the EDP priorities:

(E) to meet its statutory responsibilities on the curriculum, the LEA should:

- (i) produce a statement of its secular curriculum policy;*
- (ii) provide guidance on sex education and assure itself that school provision meets the requirements;*
- (iii) institute a review of the agreed syllabus for religious education.*

103. The LEA has responded well to these recommendations. In relation to (i), it has not yet completed consultation on the secular curriculum, in part because of the poor quality of initial responses. However, it has, most usefully, broadened the discussion to cover issues of management, planning and teaching. It has thereby initiated a salutary debate about standards, of a kind not familiar in Barnsley. In relation to (ii) it has reissued the existing guidance, with further accompanying remarks, but has decided to wait for guidance from DfEE, before completing the

work. In relation to (iii) the agreed syllabus has been rewritten, after consultation, has been well received and is in use in schools. Unusually, the LEA monitors the quality of RE provision in schools, through link adviser support to schools' self-evaluation. It thus meets its statutory duties better than many authorities.

Support for target setting

104. The OFSTED report also recommended that the authority should:

(J) (iv) ensure that those few schools which are not setting sufficiently challenging targets are given every encouragement to do so.

The LEA has responded well to this recommendation. Its response to the need for challenging targets is exemplified in the section on numeracy (see paragraphs 85-88 above). It has provided governors with high quality guidance on their role in target-setting.

Recommendations

In order to further improve school improvement strategy, the school effectiveness team and the EAZ should:

- jointly clarify the target-setting process for schools within the Education Action Zone, taking account of the initiatives in which each school is involved;
- the school effectiveness team should produce a single document for schools showing the scope of all projects provided through the EDP, the SRB and the EAZ, and explain how access to each project can be achieved.

In order to improve the planning of its school improvement work, the school effectiveness team should:

- review all its documentation, to ensure that it sets out clearly its understandings and intentions, and that it carries the authority that comes with being well-conceived and well presented;
- increase the rigour with which advisory visits are monitored to ensure a consistent and explicit focus on standards;
- in consultation with schools, draw up a policy for its intervention in schools causing concern. This would entail rewriting the LEA's sevenfold categorisation of schools;
- undertake a further, radical revision of the EDP during 2000, setting out more clearly the content of activities and ensuring that each activity is well targeted; set out within the document each activity's cost to the authority, and explain the means of access to each activity by schools; and ensure that all success criteria are equally tight and demanding;

- consider vesting strategic oversight of support for literacy and numeracy in steering groups which bring together relevant interest within the Council, and the broader stakeholders of the local authority.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION

Summary

105. At the time of the previous inspection provision for pupils with SEN was poorly managed by the authority and value for money was unsatisfactory. The report recommended the LEA to:

- (K) (i) maintain the momentum of progress in the issuing, review and amendment of statements of special educational needs;*
- (ii) revise the criteria for the assessment of pupils at stages 2 and 3 of the Code of Practice so as to put clearer emphasis on the characteristics of learning difficulties;*
- (iii) change its approach to the resourcing of statements of special educational needs so as to give schools greater discretion over the means and the deployment of support;*
- (iv) analyse school expenditure on special educational needs and use this analysis to inform the wider consideration of the overall allocation of funding to schools;*
- (v) pursue its plans to rationalise the management of its special educational needs support services, and focus the planning and evaluation of the services clearly on the outcomes for pupils;*
- (vi) increase, when resources allow, the amount of educational psychology time available, but in the meantime ensure that (a) the existing time of psychologists is used in schools to good effect, (b) there is no duplication of work with other support services, and (c) there is closer service involvement with curriculum development in literacy and numeracy;*
- (vii) specify for each support service what it does, on what basis and with what intended outcomes, so that schools and parents have a clear picture of the service they are to receive;*
- (viii) provide itself with the capacity and systems necessary (a) to monitor the quality and impact of provision for pupils with special educational needs and (b) to provide schools with co-ordinated and pertinent advice on the organisation of support, the production and use of individual education plans, approaches to teaching and the evaluation of pupils' progress.*

106. Progress in implementing these recommendations has been very satisfactory. Significant progress has been made in ensuring a more coordinated approach to the provision and support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), although a revised SEN policy and a more clearly articulated SEN strategy are still needed. Improvements have been made in relation to statements of SEN and their resourcing. Work is still needed to improve the consistency of provision in mainstream schools at stages 2 and 3 of the SEN Code of Practice, but some progress has been made in this regard. The SEN audit has proved useful but needs to be further developed. Greater clarity now exists as to the aims and purposes of each of the support services and the authority is aware of the need to develop further its planning for, and monitoring and evaluation of, pupils' outcomes.

107. The management of this area of the authority's work has been restructured sensibly. A pupil and family service has been created, covering a wide range of services. Significant appointments have been made in respect of two new posts – the head of the pupil and family service, and a senior adviser for inclusion.

108. Considerable progress has been made in respect of the promptness of issuing of statements of special educational need. The 18-week target is now met in 88 per cent of cases. An improved administrative staffing structure has been put into place. A survey of parents indicated reasonable satisfaction with the process of statutory assessment and with the way in which parents' concerns were handled.

109. Progress has also been made in the arrangements for reviewing and, where necessary, amending statements of SEN. The monitoring of this process has identified some weaknesses which are being addressed. Good procedures are in place to ensure the quality of amended statements.

110. At the time of the first inspection, advice on the criteria for assessing and referring pupils was being reviewed in respect of the characteristics of pupils placed at stages 2 and 3 of the SEN Code of Practice. The LEA has formulated principles rather than strict criteria to improve schools' decision-making in relation to the placement of pupils on the SEN register. The guidance which is to be issued to schools will help them to make a more effective interpretation of their assessment data in respect of pupils with SEN. As a consequence, teachers' understanding of the characteristics of pupils' learning difficulties experienced by pupils at each school stage of the Code of Practice should improve.

111. Until recently the resourcing of statements has been expressed mainly in terms of hours allocated to curriculum support assistants. This was judged at the first inspection as unduly limiting. Much progress has since been made towards increasing the flexibility for schools to make appropriate provision for pupils with SEN. The LEA proposes initially to devolve, and subsequently to delegate, funds for pupils on statements. These proposals are based on limited consultation with secondary schools but are soundly made. Schools will be able to respond more flexibly to pupils' needs. The outcomes for pupils are likely to be positive. Arrangements are in hand to support and monitor the introduction of the new procedures.

112. An audit of pupils with SEN has been carried out since the last inspection. As a consequence the LEA developed a model of provision made at stages 2 and 3 of the SEN Code of Practice, and this has been used in the authority's review of the overall allocation of funding for SEN to schools. However, an analysis of actual spending on SEN by each school has not yet been undertaken. The nature of the audit and the subsequent model of provision require further development. The audit led to some minor adjustments being made to the allocation of funds for SEN to schools for the current financial year. However, more work needs to be done to create a full match between pupils' needs and the funding required to meet these needs within a delegated budget. Furthermore, there is not yet complete transparency in the total funding allocated to meeting pupils' SEN including that contained in the age weighted pupil unit.

113. The various SEN support services were, until recently, a group of separate teams largely providing direct support to pupils. Coordination across services was poor. Considerable progress has been made towards the rationalisation of the management and the delivery of these support services. Headteachers generally

comment favourably on the improvements and identify an improved structure and greater consultation, with the support work better focused on what goes on in the classroom. There is evidence of greater coordination with the various services working jointly together, having established effective work boundaries and priorities.

114. New structures have also recently been put in place to promote strategic planning for pupils with SEN, including the SEN strategy forum. However, the SEN policy lacks detail, for example, in respect of funding arrangements, the role of LEA services, the central administrative support available to schools, the use of resourced provision in mainstream schools, advice on the use of additional resources, and the future role of special schools. Procedures are in place to monitor and evaluate the overall effectiveness of the support services, and SEN provision more generally, but these are not yet sufficiently focused on the outcomes for pupils.

115. Detailed guidance has been prepared for schools on the functions and procedures of each of the various support services. There is as yet, however, no such document for parents although plans are in place to improve the information for parents of pre-school children with SEN.

116. The psychology service has had a small increase in staffing since the last inspection, which has resulted in the educational psychologists spending slightly more time in schools. A review of the psychology service has recently been undertaken and some positive changes to the delivery of the service have resulted - more focused work, improved recording of work undertaken, and improved evaluation of the work of individual psychologists and of the service as a whole. A useful service guide has been prepared for schools with a detailed statement of what support can be expected. The psychology service is making a significant contribution to raising standards of literacy through its training of curriculum support assistants and of teachers of pupils with specific learning difficulties. Further work is planned through a conference on literacy and SEN.

117. The appointment of new senior staff has substantially increased the authority's ability to improve its monitoring of the quality of provision for pupils with SEN. The proposed further increases in the SEN advisory team will significantly improve the monitoring of the quality and effectiveness of the provision made in all schools. Work on the latter is still at an early stage of development. The authority has, however, sought to clarify the purpose, use and effectiveness of pupils' individual education plans. Although improvements are not yet to be seen in all schools significant progress has been made in many schools. The LEA is also improving the quality of teaching of pupils with SEN through advice from the senior adviser and through the authority's website. An increased range of training opportunities for senior staff and SENCOs has been made available. The difficult matter of assessing the impact of SEN provision has yet to be tackled, although attention has been given to obtaining baseline information from which progress can subsequently be assessed.

Recommendations

To improve the provision for special educational needs:

- the LEA's policy for pupils with special educational needs should be revised to include greater detail of the role and provision of services to schools. It also needs to continue to develop a clearly articulated SEN strategy to ensure that the needs of all pupils with SEN are met;
- the momentum of progress should be maintained in developing better targeted arrangements for the resourcing of pupils not on statements, as well as those who are, by (a) improving further the transparency of allocating funds for pupils with SEN and (b) increasing the proportion of funding delegated to schools;
- the momentum of progress should be maintained in improving the planning, monitoring and evaluation of provision for SEN pupils, but with a greater focus on pupils' performance in mainstream and special schools.

SECTION 4: ACCESS

Support for behaviour and provision of education otherwise than at school

118. The previous inspection showed that although the LEA managed the exclusions process well, the provision of alternative education was haphazard and some pupils waited too long for it. A number of pupils with statements of SEN had only part-time provision out of school, and overall very little provision exceeded 10 hours a week. The Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) lacked operational detail and the authority had not evaluated the work of its educational support team (BEST).

119. The report recommended that to improve its provision for behaviour support and education otherwise than at school the LEA should:

- (G) i) set out operational planning for pursuing its Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) so that targets for particular actions are specified and the contribution of SSD is better represented;*
- ii) commission an evaluation of the work of the BEST;*
- iii) a) review and improve provision for secondary EBD including those not on the roll of a school;*
 - b) ensure that alternative provision is made with all due speed for pupils excluded from school;*
 - c) pursue its plan to bring EOTAS under co-ordinated management.*

120. The authority has begun a range of work in line with the recommendations and this is likely to lead to improvement, but as yet it has not made enough difference to provision. The school survey and interviews during this inspection indicated that schools are often very dissatisfied with what is available for excluded pupils. There are still fundamental weaknesses in the nature of provision which need a long-term solution.

121. Progress on making the BSP operational has been slower than planned, because of the authority's management restructure. However, a strategic group has now been formed which involves a good range of services and partners, and it is engaged on developing a rolling plan. The group has set itself a series of relevant tasks. The range of work currently envisaged underlines the daunting scope of what has to be done.

122. Another weakness has been the LEA's failure to relocate the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) because it has not been able to find suitable new premises. Therefore, despite the aim of relocating it by January 2000 it still operates in unsatisfactory accommodation. Even so, some progress has been made on one aspect: the majority of secondary excluded pupils now receive 15 hours tuition a week at the PRU and planning is in hand to increase the weekly hours to 20 for 11-14 year olds from September 2000.

123. However, the LEA has achieved clear success in establishing a new management structure which unites this area of work with SEN issues in the pupil and family services division. This is enabling the authority to gain a better overview of the area than hitherto. It has also sensibly created a new post responsible for

individual needs, and a new senior education welfare officer post to deal more speedily with alternative provision. This is likely to meet the relevant part of the recommendation in the inspection report. However, there was some delay in getting the new management structure in place and this temporarily impeded progress on other aspects of the recommendation.

124. The authority has commissioned an independent evaluation of BEST, as recommended, and wisely broadened the scope of this study in order to get a more comprehensive steer on what improvement was needed overall in behaviour support. This study is about to be completed, having been slightly delayed for unavoidable reasons. Until this evaluation is available the authority will not be able to begin the large scale rethinking of provision which it intends.

125. The authority has, meanwhile, undertaken useful action on certain specifics. It has clarified the partnership with a secondary school where a resourced EBD unit is based, and senior officers are currently discussing EBD provision with schools' special needs coordinators. The school effectiveness team has reviewed provision at the PRU. A panel now meets regularly to review provision for excluded pupils and delays in making alternative provision for them are being reduced. Fixed term exclusions are now monitored very frequently by the LEA. The work of BEST has been extended to a wider range of schools.

126. Despite the limited nature of tangible progress so far, the LEA has laid the groundwork for comprehensive reform in this area. It has begun to develop its thinking on providing a continuum of provision, using a range of providers and with flexible use of resources, in order to promote reintegration into mainstream schools for excluded pupils, or better inclusion for those with major behavioural problems. The already improved links with social services augur well. However, it will be necessary for the authority to move with real speed once it has received the independent evaluation report if the anxieties of some headteachers about its provision are to be allayed, and if vulnerable pupils are to receive the education they deserve.

Support for children in public care

127. The first OFSTED report found that liaison with social services on the educational provision for children looked after by the Council was poor. It therefore recommended that:

(F) To improve its support for the education of looked-after children, the LEA should require rapid joint action by the Education and Social Services departments to ensure that:

- (i) (a) information about the attainment of looked-after children is shared and kept up-to-date and (b) targets are set for improvement in their attainment;*
- (ii) Steps are taken to reduce the number of looked-after children excluded from school.*

128. The LEA has responded very well to these recommendations. Its arrangements for sharing information and making coordinated decisions about the education,

placement and care of children in public care are now excellent. Liaison between social services and education services now occurs at several levels – between directors, and on a weekly basis, between the assistant director (pupils and family services) and her opposite number, and between their teams and at the operational level. Unusually, advocates for the children exist in both departments – the education advocate in social services and the individual needs coordinator in the LEA. Both have the remit of ensuring that these children’s needs are met. Their work is complemented by that of a nurse, financed by the health authority. Liaison at the strategic level is therefore matched by management arrangements for coordination at the school level. The next obvious step is to locate family-related services at school sites in order to match integrated management with integrated provision.

129. This unusual degree of coordination is aided by a database, shared by education services, social services and the health authority and funded by the Health Action Zone. It has also been supported by a training programme, of which the initial stages have been completed, to ensure that all concerned know their role within the corporate parenting process. Designated teachers are in place in all schools, and effective guidance has been provided to them. Children in public care are known to schools, and appropriate targets have been set for their inclusion within school and for their attainment.

Recommendations:

In order to improve behaviour support and provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school:

- a strategic response should be developed to the independent evaluation study as soon as it is available, and schools and other partners consulted on its implications with a view to taking early action.

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Management

A. In order to regularise its delegation of powers, the Council should:

- revise its scheme for delegation to bring it into line with the recent management restructuring.

B. In order to ensure that the strategic links now established between education and social services bear fruit, the Chief Executive should:

- monitor regularly the outcomes of strategic co-operation between education and social services to ensure that this is leading to improved co-operation in front line services.

C. In order to ensure that the authority now has adequate management capacity, the Chief Executive should:

- ensure that this is reviewed within the next two years.

D. In order to ensure that consultation on the funding formula is effective, senior managers should:

- ensure that both the time allowed for further work on reviewing the funding formula and the resources provided to support the process are sufficient.

E. In order to establish SLAs which are beneficial to schools:

- SLAs for services sold to schools should be developed to: provide more detailed specifications of service level and performance, establish arrangements for the settlement of disputes, provide greater choice, and improve information on requirements for schools not buying the LEA service.

School Improvement

F. In order to further improve school improvement strategy, the school effectiveness team and the EAZ should:

- jointly clarify the target-setting process for schools within the Zone, taking account of the initiatives in which each school is involved;
- the school effectiveness team should produce a single document for schools showing the scope of all projects provided through the EDP, the SRB and the EAZ, and explain how access to each project can be achieved.

G. In order to improve the planning of its school improvement work, the school effectiveness team should:

- review all its documentation, to ensure that it sets out clearly its understandings and intentions, and that it carries the authority that comes with being well-conceived and well presented;
- increase the rigour with which advisory visits are monitored to ensure a consistent and explicit focus on standards;
- in consultation with schools, draw up a policy for its intervention in schools causing concern. This would entail rewriting the LEA's sevenfold categorisation of schools;
- undertake a further, radical revision of the EDP during 2000, setting out more clearly the content of activities and ensuring that each activity is well targeted; set out within the document each activity's cost to the authority, and explain the means of access to each activity by schools; and ensure that all success criteria are equally tight and demanding;
- consider vesting strategic oversight of support for literacy and numeracy in steering groups which bring together relevant interest within the Council, and the broader stakeholders of the local authority.

Special Educational Needs

H. To improve the provision for special educational needs:

- the LEA's policy for pupils with special educational needs should be revised to include greater detail of the role and provision of services to schools. It also needs to continue to develop a clearly articulated SEN strategy to ensure that the needs of all pupils with SEN are met;
- the momentum of progress should be maintained in developing better targeted arrangements for the resourcing of pupils not on statements, as well as those who are, by (a) improving further the transparency of allocating funds for pupils with SEN and (b) increasing the proportion of funding delegated to schools;
- the momentum of progress should be maintained in improving the planning, monitoring and evaluation of provision for SEN pupils but with a greater focus on pupils' performance in mainstream and special schools.

Access

I. In order to improve behaviour support and provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school:

- a strategic response should be developed to the independent evaluation study as soon as it is available and schools and other partners consulted on its implications with a view to taking early action.

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