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EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 78 schools. The response rate was 82 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 11 primary schools, four secondaries, two special schools and a pupil referral unit (PRU). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. The City of York is a small Unitary Authority, created in April 1996 as a result of Local Government Reorganisation. It serves a relatively advantaged area, although there is considerable variation within this broad picture. LEA schools perform well overall, though with wide variations. Results of National Curriculum tests at seven and eleven, and GCSE, GNVQ and GCE Advanced Level examinations have been consistently above the national average and the average for similar LEAs.

5. This is a very well run LEA, highly regarded by its schools. The Council provides a strong corporate steer and the Educational Services Department responds well to this. The cross-directorate and multi-agency work, for example to combat social exclusion, has been very productive. Elected members on the Educational Services Committee are very well informed and have a clear sense of direction. Senior officers provide strong leadership and have managed the authority's resources to good effect. The constructive collaboration between these two groups is key to the overall success of the LEA. The LEA knows where its few weaknesses lie from its own dialogue with schools.

6. The LEA has one of the lowest Standard Spending Assessments for education, and has consistently spent above this. Considerable success has been achieved in procuring additional finance, both from central government grants and from other sources. Moreover, the LEA has been unusually successful in building partnerships, notably with the private and voluntary sectors, and in utilising, in a highly creative way, the expertise that resides in the schools themselves. Nevertheless, the team of officers at the centre is small and hard-pressed and has taken on a wide range of initiatives. They need now to give more consideration to how they can build on successful outcomes in the longer term so as to maximise the benefits to schools.

7. The authority is characterised by its many considerable strengths. The following functions are exercised particularly well:

- the allocation of resources to priorities;
- consultation with schools and other partners;
- collaboration with other services and agencies;
- support for school governors;
- support to schools in the use of performance data;
- support for literacy;
- support for school management;
- support for Special Educational Needs (SEN) co-ordinators and Learning Support Assistants;
- support for pupils with no school place;
- support for school attendance;
- behaviour support for schools;
- support for looked after children;
- measures to combat social exclusion;
- support for performing arts;
- support for early years;
- financial support ;
- human resources support.

8. There are weaknesses, but they are few in number and heavily outweighed by the strengths. The following functions are not exercised adequately:

- strategic planning for SEN;
- support for Information and Communication Technology (ICT), both in the curriculum and in management and administration.

9. The school community in York is marked by a very high level of co-operation and mutual trust. The LEA was quick to establish a strong sense of partnership and has developed good relationships with schools. The emphasis on partnership working is to be found in many aspects of the LEA's work, but this has not stopped officers taking difficult decisions when required. Reducing surplus places in secondary schools and standardising the admissions policy for rising fives are examples of this, but headteachers in particular feel they have contributed to and have a good understanding of LEA policies.

10. The problems with SEN and ICT are important ones, as both are central to the core intentions of the LEA. There are strategic problems with the central SEN staffing structure, with some confusion of strategic and delivery roles. In addition, there is a lack of clarity over the role of special schools and their relationship to specialist units in mainstream schools. There have been problems with the ICT strategy, both in terms of curriculum and administration; improvements have been hindered by the loss of key personnel.

11. The LEA is perfectly capable of addressing these aspects of its work, which do not come up to its high expectations, and has already begun to do so. Overall the schools in York are well served by their LEA, which has set a rapid pace of change and moved quickly to a position of strength. Some initiatives need a degree of consolidation, but the LEA has built the trust and goodwill needed to manage rapid change. It has made, under dynamic leadership, a very good start and has the capacity to improve further.

SECTION ONE: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. The City of York Local Education Authority (LEA) was established on 1 April 1996, following local government re-organisation (LGR). It is a small LEA with a population of 177,400 and a school population of about 25,000. It covers the city of York and the surrounding area.

13. Indicators show that York is relatively advantaged, but with a broad spread of socio-economic conditions and disparities between urban and rural areas. The proportions of residents educated to first degree level and to GCE A level are above the national averages, as is the incidence of home ownership. Entitlement to free school meals is 13.5 per cent in primary schools, compared with 18.9 per cent nationally, and 10.5 per cent for secondary schools, compared with 16.9 per cent nationally. The proportion of pupils with statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) is 3.2 per cent, close to the national figure of 3.0 per cent.

14. Minority ethnic communities comprised 1 per cent of the total population in the 1991 census, compared to the national figure of 6.2 per cent. The proportion of children from ethnic minorities in schools is 1.5 per cent. There are 59 Traveller children in primary schools and 25 in secondary schools (0.3 per cent overall).

15. The authority maintains one nursery school, 60 primary schools, of which ten are infant schools and nine junior schools, 12 secondary schools, eight of which are 11-16 and four 11-18, four special schools, three special units and one Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The percentage of under-fives on the roll of a primary school is 65.6 per cent. Pupils from the eight 11-16 schools have guaranteed entry to York College, providing they meet entry requirements.

Performance

16. From the full range of evidence available, the attainment of pupils on entry to full-time education appears, overall, to be in line with the national average.

17. Thereafter, overall attainment is good at all stages, although with wide variation between schools. Test and examination results in 1999 were typical of recent years:

- at the end of Key Stage 2, the percentages of eleven year olds attaining level 4 and above in English, mathematics and science tests were above the national and statistical neighbours' averages;
- improvement in Key Stage 2 English and mathematics between 1996 and 1999 was similar to the national rate;
- the percentage of 16 year olds gaining five or more grades A* to C at GCSE was above the national average and the average for statistical neighbours; the improvement rate since 1996 has been in line with the national rate;

- the average A Level points score per pupil for those entered for two or more subjects at the age of 18 was well above both the national average and the average for statistical neighbours;
- the average points score per pupil in advanced GNVQ was above the national average and well above the average for statistical neighbours; pass rates in all vocational courses were above both averages.

18. Inspection findings have reflected the strong picture of attainment and have also shown that the quality of teaching both in primary and secondary schools is better than that observed nationally. The quality of teaching in secondary schools has improved between the first and second cycle of inspections at a faster rate than is the case nationally.

19. Rates of attendance in both primary and secondary schools are better than the national averages and those for statistical neighbours. Exclusion rates have been relatively high in previous years, but have reduced significantly in the past year.

Funding

20. York receives a low Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) compared to its statistical neighbours and to the national average. This is £2414 per pupil compared to the national average of £2658, and a unitary authority average of £2610. Since its inception in 1996, York has put a high priority on education and budgeted to spend above education SSA. It passed on all the 1999/00 increase in education SSA to the education budget.

		1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Budget	£m	54.39	59.29	62.27
Education SSA	£m	52.18	57.08	60.32
Budget as % of SSA		104	104	103

21. The LEA has been extremely effective in seeking additional and external funding and in supporting and targeting schools to access this. All of this is concerned with raising achievement and has positive links to economic development, lifelong learning and other corporate goals. Most notable is the schools learning together (SLT) project, with £650,000 of funding from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and £250,000 from the DfEE's Specialist Schools Programme. Like other LEAs, the authority has to address the implications of the short term nature of funding. Given the size of the central team, schools were rightly concerned about the sustainability of projects and initiatives. In some cases, especially in the areas of SEN and behaviour, insufficient consideration has been given to planning beyond the lifetime of the funding.

22. York delegates 82 per cent of the individual school budget (ISB), which is higher than similar LEAs, as was the increase in delegated funding to schools between 1998/9 to 1999/00. To meet statutory requirements, very little extra has to be delegated in 2000. The LEA's monitoring of school budgets is effective.

£ per pupil

1999/00	York	Statistical Neighbours	Unitary LEAs	England
Local Schools Budget (LSB)	£2526	£2513	£2598	£2625
Delegated school budget (ISB & SF)	£2102	£2055	£2127	£2162

23. York has retained slightly more for strategic services than similar LEAs: £55 per pupil compared to £49 for statistical neighbours and £54 for Unitary LEAs, but the amount it must delegate next year to complete Fair Funding is half of the comparators. Spending on school improvement per pupil is below all the comparator groups and highlights the small central resource.

24. The LEA's work with schools to make the inherited funding formula to more accurately reflect the needs of York pupils has made good progress. There are clear consultation papers with modelled options on the key areas under consideration. Recent improvements to the post-16 element have developed from the national pilot and include retention and achievement. The review of the formula for special schools was deferred to be considered with the current SEN review. This is addressing the role and rolls of the special schools and specialist units. The surplus places in special schools and the instability of funding are unsatisfactory and this is recognised by the authority. Funding arrangements are unclear for pupils who are dual-registered in special and mainstream schools. The SEN review should include consideration of the devolution or delegation to schools of all appropriate SEN budgets.

25. The LEA has a good strategy to maximise funding for priorities in the asset management plan (AMP). There is an innovative Council venture fund, which has funded some school building improvements through projected revenue savings.

Council Structure

26. The Council has 53 members (27 Labour, 22 Liberal Democrat, three Conservative and one independent). Leadership of the council is currently with the Labour group. The education committee is one of ten committees. It takes a direct and active interest in the performance of schools and most of its members are involved as school governors. The education standards sub-committee plays a significant monitoring role. It meets headteachers and chairs of governors from all schools following OFSTED inspections. It also considers reports from advisers about the outcomes of LEA monitoring.

27. The education committee is fully committed to school improvement and is a significant driving force within the Council. The chair and vice-chair are involved in strategic planning, and there is a very positive and creative dynamic between them and senior officers. Considerable thought has been given to the agenda for

modernising local government and proposals are well advanced, with implementation planned for later this year.

The Education Development Plan

28. The LEA has a clear intention to move schools forward from the present strong position and the ambition of "York as a world class city" pervades its school improvement policy. The EDP embodies the LEA's priorities, which are:

- Priority 1: improving leadership and management (including governance);
- Priority 2: improving pupils' key skills (including literacy, numeracy and ICT capability);
- Priority 3: tackling under-achievement;
- Priority 4: monitoring and supporting schools experiencing difficulties.

29. The plan has many strengths. It reflects national priorities and is also well informed by a local audit of performance. The plan is strong on social inclusion. There are clear and explicit links to other major plans. Action plans are mostly clear, well focused and sensibly costed. Appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures are outlined for each action plan and for the plan overall. There is a more concise summary for parents, which is well presented. Current weaknesses in provision are clearly identified and addressed. In particular, attention is paid to disaffected and more able pupils. Another important strength of the EDP is the explicit attention paid to supporting schools in developing their capacity to take responsibility for their own development. Examples of this are paired lesson observations between advisers and school co-ordinators in numeracy and literacy, and the training of governors to help them take full responsibility for school improvement.

30. The LEA also identifies as "aspects supporting school improvement": ICT, inclusion, early years, performing arts and governor services, all of which attract specific grant funding. These aspects help to fill out the broader picture of what the LEA is trying to achieve and generally reinforce the main priorities. They underline the local emphasis on performing arts. Literacy summer schools, for example, have been extended to include personal development in the arts, sports and ICT.

31. The plan has a few weaknesses. There is a degree of overlap and duplication between priorities, especially regarding under-achieving pupils in priorities 2 and 3. Success criteria vary in their specificity. They are good for priority 4, for literacy and numeracy in priority 2, and for some of priority 3, but they are not sufficiently specific in priority 1. Attention to SEN does not pervade the priorities sufficiently.

32. The LEA has set itself targets at the upper end of the range set by the DfEE, reflecting one of its central aims of improving standards. For example, the target for the proportion of pupils attaining at Level 4 or above at the end of Key Stage 2 in literacy by 2002 is 84 per cent, working from a figure of 70 per cent in 1998. An ambitious target for 2002, of 62 per cent of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades, has been set by schools. The 1999 figure of 51.5 per cent shows the level of challenge that this reflects and the ground still to be made up.

33. The education development service (EDS) undertakes the monitoring of the EDP, with an adviser co-ordinating this for each priority. This works well. As part of the link adviser programme, all schools have been surveyed for their provision in literacy and ICT, and a survey of numeracy is planned. These resulted in clear and helpful reports to Education Committee, although the ICT survey did not pay sufficient attention to curriculum delivery and pupils' attainment.

34. Communications and consultation are clearly strengths of the LEA and the process of defining the EDP involved all those concerned with education in the City. This has led to a document that commands general support.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

35. The Council has robust internal processes to target its resources on priorities, and a good corporate performance management process. Each year budget priorities for growth and savings are identified in line with policy and clear decisions are taken in this respect. Overspends and underspends are identified and dealt with in-year, but control and monitoring of the SEN budget are weak.

36. The Council has a strong commitment to Best Value and achieved Beacon Status in housing. It was a Best Value pilot authority and has completed several reviews, including aspects of educational services, which include corporate personnel and contractor services, transport, meals and cleaning. More are under way. Schools have already noticed some improvements in services, particularly cleaning. The corporate Best Value working group included headteacher representation and the preparation of the Best Value Performance Plan included consultation and a scoring system with explicit criteria.

Recommendations

In order to improve further the strategic planning for school improvement:

- where the LEA's evaluations of projects with short-term funding are positive, fuller consideration should be given to how the work might be embedded in existing practice once external funding ceases.

In order to clarify funding for SEN:

- the review of the funding formula for schools, particularly for special schools, units and resource bases in mainstream schools, should be linked with the SEN review.

SECTION TWO: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

37. While the EDP clearly defines the LEA's priorities for school improvement, other functions also make a significant contribution. The work of the LEA's SEN services (section 4) and initiatives related to access and social inclusion (section 5) make a clear and positive contribution to the raising of achievement. The recent re-organisation of the senior management of the department brought SEN under the line of management for school improvement. This is a positive strategic move, but will need to be matched by improved overall planning for SEN.

38. The infrastructure provided for schools through management services provides a broadly effective support framework, which allows headteachers to concentrate on school improvement. Support for administrative ICT is the main weakness and this needs urgent attention to facilitate necessary developments in data transfer and the pupil-level database.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention, support

39. The well led educational development service (EDS) is central to school improvement and the implementation of the EDP. Attention to core tasks is well defined and the small advisory team of 11 divides its work mainly between implementing the EDP priorities and monitoring the work of schools. This approach makes for an effective service that does not dissipate its energies by undertaking wider and less important aspects of support.

40. Instead, the LEA extends the support available by making exceptionally creative use of the expertise to be found within the schools themselves. SLT project is woven into the strategy for school improvement and provides opportunities for high quality development at relatively low cost. For example, the use of teacher fellows, seconded from schools on a part-time basis, has enhanced work in several areas, including numeracy in primary schools and design technology in secondary schools.

41. Central support is also extended through the designation of the LEA as a specialist authority in collaboration with the Technology Colleges Trust (TCT). All secondary schools now have technology college status, with one acting as 'gatekeeper'. Extra funding is divided equally between the gatekeeper and the other schools. This has made a significant difference to the support available to schools, with the wider community and primary school link aspects of specialist status being provided through SLT. The approach is being extended to other specialisms and it is planned for all schools to specialise in one curriculum area. The flexible capacity to buy in support from elsewhere is a model of its kind. It shows how a small LEA can respond to demand in a flexible and cost effective way, while placing the onus for school improvement where it ought to be, on the schools themselves.

42. The EDS carries out a light-touch programme of monitoring in all schools. This is done well and is cost effective, providing a good overview of specific issues and alerting the authority to potential problems in individual schools. The programme is

firmly rooted in a belief in school autonomy. Over the past two years, there have been reviews of literacy, mathematics, ICT, development planning, and school self-review, resulting in clear and informative reports to standards sub-committee. All link advisers carry out the monitoring, often in collaboration with other colleagues working within their EDP priority tasks. This makes good use of specialist knowledge. The effectiveness of link advisers has improved steadily since 1996 and most schools valued their rigour and openness as well as the partnership approach to monitoring. The balance between challenge and support is well judged.

43. The LEA has started a programme of biennial reviews in selected secondary schools, aimed currently at six schools deemed to need intensive support in particular areas. This aims to be a development tool for the school in taking itself forward. The review team usefully includes a member of the school's senior management team, who observes lessons with the advisers. All monitoring is carried out against clear criteria in the quality standards framework (QSF), produced in partnership with teachers. Good use is made of performance and monitoring data in selecting these schools.

44. The LEA sets itself and its schools a good level of challenge. The need for this is identified in the educational services strategic plan. Link advisers worked closely with headteachers and governors to set high targets and to promote an understanding of the difference between targets and predictions. Challenge is also part of the wider role of EDS. The EDP acknowledges the danger of complacency and the need to challenge some schools to move away from the 'comfort zone'. The LEA actively promotes schools taking responsibility for their own improvement. This is evident in the clearly defined roles of all concerned with school improvement, and in the emphasis given to school self-review, for example in the QSF. All schools are expected to monitor, review and evaluate their approach to teaching and learning.

45. The LEA has a clearly developed strategy for intervention where schools are experiencing difficulties and uses data from a variety of sources to identify where this is necessary. Additional support has been effective in most cases, having been clearly aimed at the identified areas of difficulty. There had, however, been some weaknesses in support in two of the schools visited.

46. The deployment of the EDS and the service's clear focus on priorities mean that the allocation of resources in this area is well attuned to LEA intentions. The service development plan sets out clear intentions. Performance management is very effective so that there is, for example, less variability in link adviser support than is often found. Colleagues new to the service receive very thorough induction. The functions provided by the EDS give good value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

47. The LEA sees support for the collection and analysis of data as fundamental to the delivery of EDP targets and the development of self-reliant schools capable of using data to improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards of attainment. A small but highly effective research and information unit generates the LEA's data. The unit provides schools with well judged and uncluttered information

as well as alternative approaches to target setting which enhance schools' capacity to assess and target individuals. Link advisers monitor effectively the use of data on programmed visits.

48. Schools have been involved in developments at every stage and there is a high degree of trust and confidence invested in the process both by schools and the LEA. Information is routinely provided to assessment co-ordinators, headteachers and to curriculum support groups in both primary and secondary phases. The quality of training provided is high and there is significant and effective differentiation of training for advisers, headteachers, Members, governors and teachers in the use of performance data and the setting of targets. Headteachers and governors have a high level of understanding of the process of self-assessment and the use of performance data to inform target setting.

49. LEA support for the collection and analysis of data was evaluated in eighteen school visits. Support was judged to be good in ten of these, satisfactory in seven and unsatisfactory in one. These findings are consistent with the results of the school survey. The picture is of a service which is expert, well organised and meeting the needs of schools effectively. It is highly regarded by the schools, not only for the levels of support it provides, but also for the way in which it contributes to the LEA's challenge to schools to do better. It is a cost-effective service, contributing directly to the raising of standards. It provides good value for money and is continuing to improve.

Support for Literacy

50. Improving literacy standards in York, is, along with numeracy, the major element of Priority 2, Improving Pupils' Key Skills, of the EDP. A target has been set of 84 per cent of pupils reaching Level 4 and above by the year 2002. In 1999, 76 per cent reached Level 4, one percentage point above the year 2000 target. Since the start of the new LEA, standards of attainment in literacy at Key Stage 2 have never been less than the national and statistical neighbour levels and often better than them. The 2002 target therefore, although high, seems attainable.

51. The City's literacy strategy has been introduced very successfully and has laid the foundation for secure development. The work is a considerable strength of the LEA, not only in the levels of performance attained by pupils, but in systems established and the inspirational leadership provided by the consultant and the manager. During the inspection, LEA support for literacy was evaluated in 15 of the schools visited. It was judged to have been good in all of them.

52. The strengths of provision include: meticulous recording of training and development; rigorous and detailed analysis of individual pupil performance within, and between, grades; a paired lesson monitoring programme, which is already having a significant impact beyond literacy; provision of effective advice by the consultant about literacy strategies in mixed age classes; half termly co-ordinator support group meetings, which are open in sharing failures and successes; and clear identification of strengths and weaknesses in pupils' attainment.

53. At Key Stage 3, the strengths include the provision of early training for literacy coordinators and their involvement in approaches to Year 6/7 transfer (including summer literacy schools). Further training, together with careful monitoring by link advisers, is targeted to ensure that gains in performance are fully sustained after transfer from primary school.

54. The strategy was based on an effective audit of carefully analysed local circumstances, as well as agreed and sometimes renegotiated targets. Targeted schools have demonstrated significant gains, and there is a general level of improvement across Key Stages 1-3. Schools are continuing to improve their understanding of how individual pupils learn, and progress and are using this to improve target setting. Support given by the LEA to improving standards of literacy is highly effective, held in high esteem across the service and provides good value for money.

Support for Numeracy

55. The improvement of standards in numeracy is also a major priority of the EDP, which sets a target of 80 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 and above in tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2002. The figure for 1998 was 65.1 per cent and, for 1999, 75 per cent, three per cent above the target. The levels of attainment in tests are increasingly better than national and statistical neighbour levels as pupils progress through the key stages. It appears therefore that the 2002 target is high but attainable.

56. Overall, the quality of training and the implementation of the strategy are good, and continue to improve. They accord fully with national requirements. Support was evaluated in twenty schools, thirteen during the inspection and seven by HMI as part of national monitoring. Support was judged to be good in nine of these, satisfactory in eight and unsatisfactory in three. This is slightly at variance with the school survey which rated support for numeracy teaching good or better in the primary phase and satisfactory in the secondary. In the three schools where support was judged unsatisfactory, the weaknesses related in two cases to insufficient support being provided at this stage by the LEA and, in the other, to training being inappropriately pitched to the needs of the school.

57. The strategy is based on a detailed audit of strengths and weaknesses. Activities are coherent, well planned and aligned to other areas of school improvement. The approach is fully related to the LEA's QSF. In all but two schools visited, the use of data, the development of curricular targets and action planning were at least satisfactory; they were good or very good in half.

58. Support for numeracy is good overall. The LEA has built well upon the SLT initiatives, through which, for example, the York mathematics enhancement project for primary schools was introduced in 1998-99. This enabled primary schools to develop their approaches to numeracy and the LEA used this early experience to inform its own implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy. The existence of mathematics fellows in schools and the LEA's investment in additional leading mathematics teachers enhance effective dissemination of good practice throughout

the LEA.

Support for ICT

59. Improving pupils' IT capability in order to improve standards and quality is rightly a priority in the EDP. This is appropriate, as the audit of need reveals that pupils' attainment and progress are in need of improvement and the use and quality of ICT in the curriculum are weak; there is a high incidence of ICT as a key issue in OFSTED reports. The LEA has no precise figures for pupils' current attainment at different key stages, however, and without a clear picture of this, improvement will be hard to measure. This is reflected in the vague success criteria in the EDP.

60. Schools rated support for ICT very poorly in the school survey and visits to schools confirmed this view. The majority of schools, particularly primary schools, are working at a low level and lack support to develop the necessary expertise to enable them to move forward. Dissemination of good practice has been very limited and consequent developments in the classroom have therefore been restricted. The LEA has made an important start by carrying out its own review of ICT in schools.

61. Standards Fund money under the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) was distributed to all schools in the period 1998-2000. The approach for most schools has been to put the cabling in place in the first two years, and to pay for computers and other equipment from 2000-2001. This was agreed after consultation with schools through the IT user group. Although some schools have funded their own computers, this approach has frustrated others and inhibited the early development of good practice in the use of the NGfL and the Internet. Schools have experienced technical problems with NGfL facilities. The loss of the NGfL co-ordinator and the subsequent failure to replace her have made matters worse.

62. The quality of schools' ICT development plans is broadly satisfactory. The LEA has not, however, engaged in sufficiently detailed dialogue with schools about strengthening their provision and improving their pupils' attainment. This is especially the case in assessing schools' readiness for training under the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) scheme, linked to NGfL, to which most schools in the authority have now committed.

63. There are positive developments in the area of managed services for schools; the LEA is piloting two relatively low cost schemes. Once schools can delegate responsibility for the technical management and development of their ICT facilities, they will be able to concentrate more on curricular issues. They will, however, need more support to do this than is currently available from the LEA.

64. The LEA's vision for 2010 is an ambitious one. Given the centrality of ICT to core intentions with regard to raising attainment, inclusion and lifelong learning, there has been a gap in strategic thinking. Weaknesses in this area, some of which were highlighted in the LEA's own review, should be addressed as soon as possible.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

65. No school has been placed in Special Measures by OFSTED inspections since the LEA has been in place, and only one has been declared as having Serious Weaknesses. The LEA has a clear, appropriate and effective system for identifying schools experiencing difficulties. Schools are placed into one of four categories:

- Category 1 no concern;
- Category 2 schools experiencing difficulties to some degree;
- Category 3 schools with serious weaknesses/subject to a formal warning notice;
- Category 4 schools in special measures.

The definition of Category 2 schools is appropriately broad and includes high performing schools needing extra support, for example following an amalgamation, or a sudden loss of experienced staff. Such schools are identified in a variety of ways and by LEA service teams, headteachers and governors. There were 12 schools in Category 2 at the time of the inspection.

66. The broad approach to additional support is sound. The LEA and school agree a set of actions. Responsibilities and the level of extra funding are clearly identified and monitoring increased. Where necessary, other services are involved; for example, human resources may invoke competency procedures. The LEA has worked with governors on difficult staffing decisions where this was felt to be in the best interest of the school.

67. The identification of schools for category 2 generally works well and support is often well focused on the problem area, sometimes using external consultants. In some cases, however, the LEA has not been sufficiently directive or pro-active in its intervention with these schools. In one school, where there were weaknesses in management, more detailed guidance was needed in order to address shortcomings in development planning and monitoring. In another school, although LEA support was starting to have some impact, intervention had not happened early enough and a continued lack of urgency had been detrimental to the school's progress. The process of signing schools off from Category 2 support is not sufficiently clear. Although the LEA sometimes uses an OFSTED inspection as the final check on progress, there is a need to incorporate a review of the Category 2 status into the action planning process.

68. The LEA has provided good support to the school judged to have serious weaknesses. Effective support was provided to produce an action plan, monitoring by the link adviser was stepped up, and notes of his visits provided a clear outline of action to be taken. The LEA's literacy and numeracy consultants provided the school with good advice, which improved classroom practice in those areas. The governing body also received well-judged support through advice and training and is now more involved in monitoring the school's performance. These actions helped the school to make good progress.

Support for Governors

69. LEA support for governors is outstanding. Governor support was considered in the course of sixteen school visits during the inspection. LEA support was good in 15 and satisfactory in one, confirming the very positive findings of the school survey. The support and challenge provided for governors are strengths of the LEA. The York governor forum plays a key role both in consultation and in policy development in the LEA. The governors' panel is a sub-committee of the education committee and plays a significant part in its work. LEA nominations to governing bodies are used to secure individuals for their interest in the particular school and for their enthusiasm to serve. The effectiveness of this process is reflected in only 4 such vacancies at the start of this academic year from a turnover of 56.

70. Governors' guides provide an accessible analysis of all major policy issues and information to help governors exercise their responsibilities for the development and improvement of schools. They are of very high quality. Other support, in the form of meetings, training, consultative arrangements and documentation are of equally high quality. Particularly effective are: the governors' help line; the LEA response when schools experience difficulties; the positive responses to requests for individual help when needed; and the work of the schools' link advisers in helping governors to tackle all their responsibilities. There is an effective regular newsletter. The recent change in procedure for the termly consultation pack, by issuing all the information at the same time and arranging a programmed series of briefings, is helpful to governors and was a response to proposals made by them. Governor support is part of a coherent approach to school improvement providing an expert, accessible and high quality service, giving very good value for money.

Support for School Management

71. Support for school management, including curriculum and the quality of teaching, is good and highly regarded by the schools. It was never less than satisfactory in the eighteen schools visited and was good in ten. This broadly confirmed the results of the LEA survey. This support is a key element in a coherent LEA approach to raising pupils' attainment and enhancing schools' self-reliance and independence.

72. A substantial strength is the effectiveness of SLT in providing professional development for middle management, in support for curriculum development and in raising the quality of teaching. School self-review has developed well. The LEA has produced, in partnership with groups of headteachers and teachers, a self-review guide, "How Good Are We?". This includes the QSF, which also serves other purposes, including the training of senior and middle managers. The appraisal of headteachers is in place, but both it and the appraisal of teachers are not fully operational.

73. The range and quality of training for headteachers are good. There is support for the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and all newly appointed headteachers are mentored in line with the guidelines issued by the LEA. Link

advisers and officers from the human resources section work well together in providing advice to headteachers and governors on a wide variety of personnel issues. They also cooperate well in successfully tackling capability and competency issues at all levels. The arrangements for newly qualified teachers are appropriate and work well.

74. The approach and systems adopted by the LEA contribute directly to the development of confidence and expertise in headteachers and other senior and middle managers. The work of the LEA in this area is thoughtful, well judged and directly related to the differing needs of the schools. It provides good value for money.

Support for Performing Arts

75. Performing arts provision is improving rapidly from an already good base. Its importance is underlined both by its impact in underpinning Priority 2 of the EDP and as a key local priority in one of the plan's aspects. The service has developed from the inherited instrumental tuition service for a minority of children into a service whose aim is to secure "performance and creative arts for all". The activities promote pupils' self esteem and self-confidence. It contributes to raising pupil attainment, not only through the particular subjects of the service (music, dance and drama), but also through the way in which contact with experts and specialists in these areas lift the cultural horizon of all children and young people involved. It has already done some work in all schools and has made a direct contribution to raising standards through working with arts organisations. An Opera North project on Carmen, for example, involved a primary school and all four special schools. Similarly drama work with pupils with challenging behaviour has successfully used role-play to develop improved patterns of behaviour. The termly Live Arts Weeks have involved all of the City's schools and have also promoted new and effective anti-racist approaches in largely white communities. Visits to schools confirmed that the service is highly valued and that progress in implementing the relevant part of the EDP has been rapid and significant.

Support for Early Years

76. Support for early years is good; it is described comprehensively in a thoughtful, carefully constructed Early Years and Childcare Development Plan. It meets the needs of the area and reflects the importance of the significant voluntary, independent and private sector provision as well as the popularity with many families of childminder facilities. It was the result of full consultation and covers hard to reach groups, recognising the importance of making provision as early as possible for children with SEN. Planning is good; there is an effective framework and a clear direction for development. The "guarantee" for all four-year olds has been met and targets are in place to cater for increasing proportions of three year olds.

77. Schools value the arrangements for early years provision, which combines economy with effective response to local needs; they are right to do so. The school visits confirmed that schools understand the implications of the decision, in

principle, to admit pupils at the start of the term following their fifth birthday. Despite some understandable unease caused by such a radical proposal, there was a general expression of well founded trust and confidence in the LEA to work through any difficulties to a successful conclusion.

78. In summary, the partnership is well established and fully reflects the appropriate interests within the City. It is well supported by the LEA and has worked with energy and judgement to establish a good development plan, which ensures that statutory requirements are met.

Recommendations

In order to improve standards in IT capability and the use of ICT in teaching and learning, the LEA should:

- increase the level of curriculum support available to schools;
- closely check schools' readiness for NOF training against the progress of their ICT development plans.

In order to improve the support for schools experiencing difficulties the LEA should:

- develop the procedures for identifying and reviewing the level of intervention needed in schools experiencing difficulty to ensure that, where necessary, support for headteachers is more tightly focused on detailed issues of leadership and management, and that exit strategies are clearer.

SECTION THREE: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

79. The quality of corporate planning is very good. The Council communicates a clear vision to residents and matches this with a set of values that underpin its work. Important features of this vision include a commitment to lifelong learning, social inclusion, leadership and consultation. These features of the Council's work were visible to staff in the schools visited. Continuing improvement in education, working with other agencies, is central to the vision. Commitment to education is reflected in the Council budget with continued spending at levels above the SSA.

80. Strategic management at the corporate level is good. Procedures for implementing plans are clear; evaluation of their impact takes place at all levels. The Council works hard to identify the requirements of its customers and their level of satisfaction with services. There is a drive to break down the traditional barriers between directorates in order to address cross-cutting issues such as social inclusion and to open up strategic planning to service delivery teams through policy forums. Committees take clear, open and decisive action, based on sound information and advice from officers.

81. Cross-directorate and multi-agency working are strengths of the authority, already visible in education through a range of initiatives. Early Years developments, for example, involve community services and leisure, developing a holistic approach to the provision of services for very young children and their families. Mentoring programmes with the North Yorkshire business education partnership are targeting under-achievement and disaffected pupils, using a range of mentors including university students and retired citizens for more able pupils.

82. The LEA's commitment to partnership working is clearly more than simply rhetoric. The wide range of partners collaborating with the LEA praised both the LEA's broad approach to school improvement and the detailed working of partnership projects. Relationships are positive, two-way and professional. Partners from further and higher education are involved in a variety of lifelong learning initiatives and the LEA's literacy resource centre is at a local higher education establishment. Partners are consulted on priorities at an early stage.

83. Working relationships between members and senior officers of the authority are positive and productive and this is particularly true in educational services. The joint consultative committee, which brings together senior officers and elected members from across the Council, together with Health Authority representatives, is particularly effective. This group is making good progress in implementing innovative approaches to multi-agency working.

84. Within educational services, notable strengths in the leadership provided both by senior officers and members, combined with good communication between them, are the key to the many successes of this LEA. Members combine a strong sense of purpose with a good understanding of educational issues. They are well informed by senior officers, both on a day-to-day basis and through reports to the standards sub-

committee on work in schools. Their commitment is amply demonstrated by the high level of involvement in school governance amongst education committee members.

85. There is a high level of co-operation and trust within the education community in York. Headteachers and governors are well consulted by the LEA through the full range of consultative mechanisms. This strong group identity, however, brings with it potential dangers. In particular, the LEA and schools need to be especially careful that objectivity is retained in the selection of services and in Best Value judgements.

86. Strategic planning within education services is mainly good, especially in terms of the vision and direction set for the service and in the implementation of most aspects of the EDP. The high aspirations for York schools are effectively and consistently communicated. The Education Services Strategic Plan 1999–2003 takes forward the corporate vision and values, and outlines a clear and appropriate role for the LEA. The aims of the service are in line with those in the EDP and other major plans. Running through this and other documentation is a concern for school improvement, and challenging targets for 2003 are included.

87. It is in the areas of SEN and ICT where weaknesses in strategic planning run counter to the general picture. Although the LEA has developed effective SEN links between schools and services and with other agencies, there have been too many initiatives for the small hard pressed central team. Planning has been marked by a lack of clarity about the role of the special schools and their relationship to the specialist units in mainstream schools. This has caused some concern in schools.

88. ICT looms large in the Council's vision for the future. The LEA has identified the growing significance for lifelong learning and community education of ICT and access to information. It has ambitiously pledged to ensure that there is a computer in the home of every primary-aged child by 2003. If the LEA is to achieve its targets, it must match developments on the technical front by addressing the support needs of schools in developing good classroom practice.

89. Plans for the services that promote access are drawn together successfully in a wide range of inter-relating multi-agency plans. These include the behaviour support plan, the children's services plan and the Quality Protects management action plan. These link explicitly to the EDP through aspects of social inclusion. Along with its partners, the LEA has been successful in drawing down additional funding for many initiatives. The successes achieved against national and local targets to promote social inclusion mean that the services provided and the projects initiated represent good value for money.

Management Services

90. Central support services are generally very effective and highly valued by schools. Staff are expert and there are good relationships and understanding between them and schools. The transfer from North Yorkshire was smooth. There is almost full buy-back of most services, with a strong culture of mutual support.

91. The LEA has the management capacity to improve further, using Best Value

reviews. It has surveyed schools about all of its services annually and has improved its services in response to criticisms. Information on traded services is clear, but there is scope to improve it by clarifying the core entitlement and other sources of funding, such as the EDP. Benchmarking of services and costs has been undertaken against similar LEAs. Some central sections are close to being overstretched. Schools have recognised this and are now ready for a more detailed review and evaluation of central service specifications, standards, and costs in order to improve service response and the use of school and central staff time.

92. ICT support for administration is a weakness recognised by the LEA. All aspects of ICT were criticised in the schools survey and on school visits. The LEA has responded positively in the past half year and developed a sound strategy, convened a school ICT group, delivered some basic improvements and set a timetable. There remains, however, much to do. Recently, officers consulted all schools on options for managed services for both administration and curriculum ICT. E-mail is now reliable, although some headteachers do not have personal access. There is an improved helpline and customer care, but schools and the LEA continue to waste some of their administrative resources because of the lack of coherence in electronic data collection.

93. The lack of a clear strategy, under investment and a reliance on too large a range of suppliers have left structural problems. These are exemplified by the decision to standardise on different administrative software in primary and secondary schools. These problems have led to difficulties in providing support, and to a lack of compatibility between primary and secondary pupil records. They affect the efficiency of schools' financial reconciliation with the council's central financial system and make updating the new personnel/payroll system more difficult than it need have been.

94. The Human Resources service is delegated and very effective in day-to-day support, advice and training, the publication of model procedures and support for difficult issues. It is highly valued by schools and has 100 per cent buy-back. Payroll, and the training and development of support staff, will be delegated in 2000. The service provides model policies whilst also developing schools' own management, thereby reducing the need to give routine advice. Excellent support has been given for disciplinary and capability procedures. However, the service is at times overburdened with cases and this can cause delays. The LEA has responded to schools by setting up a cost-effective supply teacher agency, and is planning more sickness absence and stress management advice for schools.

95. Financial support is an effective service, valued by schools. There is 100 per cent buy-back of a tailored service which ranges from a full peripatetic bursar service taken up by small primary schools, to limited advice to those schools with their own bursars. All schools are provided with benchmarked information and advice to support and develop five year budget planning. There is close and effective monitoring of surpluses and deficits.

96. Nearly every school visited commented that cleaning had been very poor, but had now been improved. This has been achieved through revisions to the

specification, re-tendering, close monitoring and responsiveness to school's concerns. Detailed reviews have also improved home to school transport, grounds maintenance and school meals.

97. School buildings are generally in good condition, and the LEA manages its assets well. When repairs are needed schools receive a rapid and customer-focused response. The asset management plan (AMP) and condition surveys form a good basis for the prioritisation of work. More is spent on planned than reactive maintenance and an AMP advisory group of headteachers is being set up.

98. The LEA delegated repairs and maintenance in 1999, offering a 'one-stop shop' which has almost 100 per cent buy-back of all its elements. This includes a reactive emergency repairs service, which effectively acts as a pooled insurance mechanism. The quality and responsiveness of the service and the three year maintenance plan provides good value to schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for ICT in administration, the LEA should:

- expedite the plans to enable efficient electronic data transfer, including the standardisation of software for this purpose.

SECTION FOUR: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Strategy

99. The LEA's commitment to inclusion and raising the attainment of all pupils is identified as an aspect of the EDP and has been the subject of extensive review, consultation and discussion with schools, parents and other agencies since 1996. The LEA has made efforts to develop the pattern of local provision, to better meet the needs of the City of York. Nevertheless, whilst there are strengths in the LEA's delivery of SEN services to schools and pupils, there are weaknesses in the management and planning for SEN, which the current review recognises and seeks to address.

100. In line with its declared aim to educate, wherever possible, its pupils in York schools, the LEA has developed local specialist units and enhanced provision attached to mainstream schools to provide a continuum of flexible support. This development has, of necessity, been somewhat piecemeal as the new authority took opportunities to establish local provision in line with its broad strategic aims and against a changing national picture. It has been successful in that the number of out-of-LEA placements has reduced from 100 in 1996 to 56 in 1998 and the percentage of children with statements educated in mainstream schools has increased to 58 per cent in 1999. Overall, 98 per cent of pupils are educated in mainstream schools, a figure that is line with the national average.

101. The strengths of the LEA's strategy lie in its success in developing a wide range of effective links between schools and LEA support services, and between Council departments and local agencies. Parental satisfaction is high and parents are, along with other stakeholders, fully involved in the current major review of SEN provision. An increasing emphasis on early intervention is also apparent in the shift of resources towards meeting the needs of children at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice and in the training provided for schools.

102. There are, however, weaknesses in the LEA's strategic approach. Some reflect its eagerness to embrace a wide range of initiatives that support its aims with a small, hard pressed, central team of officers who have had too little opportunity to work in a settled management structure. Over the lifetime of the authority, staffing changes to key senior posts involving responsibility for SEN advice, policy and management have contributed to this instability.

103. The current review of the LEA management structure has resulted in a closer strategic alignment to the school improvement functions of the LEA and this is a sound development. In the interim, the increased strategic management responsibilities of some managers conflict with their service responsibilities. This is a particular cause for concern for the post of Principal Educational Psychologist and for members of the SEN Assessment Panel (SENAP). The former offers formal statutory advice to the LEA as well as being the manager responsible for acting on this advice. He has budgetary responsibility and has to match the LEA's response to his service's statements. SENAP makes decisions about statements, which some of its members have been involved in writing, and some SENAP members are also

budget holders. Overall, the interim management structure for SEN is not a sufficiently robust model to enable the LEA to build on the outcomes of the SEN review and assure the medium term effectiveness of its services.

104. A lack of clarity over the role of special schools, and their relationship to the specialist units and mainstream schools, has affected the confidence of staff in the special schools. The LEA has not completed a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of its policies to help persuade those with reservations about the educational benefits of its detailed strategy, although this is now under way.

Statutory obligations

105. The evidence presented by the LEA and that gained from visits to schools shows that, with one exception, the LEA takes all reasonable action to ensure that its statutory obligations are met. The demand for places at the speech and language unit has resulted in statements being written which name the unit but suggest that in-school support in a mainstream school should be provided until such a time as a unit place can be provided. This amounts to a statutory failing on the part of the LEA, as the provision identified in the statement is not being met in the mainstream school. The LEA should extend its own provision or seek to meet these needs elsewhere.

Improvement and Value for Money

106. Good training and support for SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs) and for teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) in mainstream schools, combined with the LEA support for including pupils with SEN, result in a positive contribution to school improvement. The educational psychology service (EPS) is highly effective, both in the assessment of pupils' needs and in the advice and training offered to schools. Statements contain satisfactory information. Statements for pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) are good, with specific and highly relevant provision identified. Individual Education Plans are tightly written and provide an excellent basis for planning by schools and for the work of the highly regarded Learning Support Service and the Sensory Support Services.

107. The LEA spends an average of £149 per pupil on SEN, slightly below the national average but in line with similar authorities. Schools know what funds have been delegated to them, although governors in some schools have not reported on the use of SEN funds to parents. In two secondary schools the use of SEN funds to reduce overall class size represents inappropriate use of these resources and one that renders an evaluation of their effectiveness difficult to achieve. A relatively high level of the LEA budget for in-school support is retained centrally and deployed by the LEA. Some schools have not yet recognised that this will have to change and nor has the LEA given sufficiently clear guidance on its expectations for the use and monitoring of these funds. A scheme for delegation is to be piloted in one secondary school.

108. The LEA's budget for SEN is projected to overspend in the current financial

year, for the first time since the unitary authority came into being. There are weaknesses in budget control and management, particularly in the management of the LSA budget and the over protection of the budgets of special schools experiencing falling rolls. Overall, the steps taken to redirect resources in line with the LEA's policies and the high quality of the support services provided, offer satisfactory value for money.

Analysis

109. Much has been achieved and schools have a positive view of the services. Appeals against LEA statements by parents are very few, with only one appeal (which was not upheld) being made to a SEN tribunal since 1996. The LEA has succeeded in gaining the support of mainstream schools for its policy of inclusion. However, many of its SEN initiatives are heavily dependent on the allocation of short-term funds such as the Standards Fund. Future funding for key posts, for example the autism development worker and specialist educational psychologists, are not incorporated into the base budget leaving a sense of fragility for the future.

110. In 1998 only 58 per cent of statements were produced within the 18-week national guideline. This was unsatisfactory. However, increased staffing and the re-organisation of the statutory assessment team means that in 1999/2000 so far this figure has increased to over 90 per cent.

111. The LEA has actively and successfully promoted links with other agencies and now needs to consolidate some of the excellent initiatives with the Health Authority and those involving higher and further education establishments. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that, for example, speech therapy services are able to respond to identified needs in statements and that regional initiatives for the development of autism respite care are progressed. Effective examples of multi-disciplinary working are found in the patch teams brought together to work with schools, for example in the York east partnership project.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic planning for SEN, the LEA should:

- develop a management structure for SEN that gives a proper separation of management functions and enables budget managers to discharge their duties effectively.

In order to meet statutory requirements for SEN, the LEA should:

- address with some urgency the mismatch between statements that name unit places, and the availability of such places.

In order to ensure the best use of delegated funds for SEN, the LEA should:

- give clear advice to governing bodies about monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the use of these funds.

SECTION FIVE: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places.

112. The LEA has used data well to develop its school organisation, infant class size and asset management plans and link them effectively to school improvement. The school organisation committee is developing its own local and distinctive role. A shadow school organisation committee was set up in 1999 to oversee the review of secondary education.

113. The LEA has maximised opportunities to reduce surplus places by a range of initiatives. The planning for the closure of a secondary school has been carried out with exemplary consultation and care for the continuing education of the pupils and future of the staff. The LEA consulted extensively before deciding on changes to both primary and secondary admissions policies. This has been achieved with the participation of schools, parents and other partners, keeping their individual and collective confidence. Overall work on school admissions and organisation represents good value for money.

114. The School Organisation Plan provides a clear framework for future reviews to consider surplus places in the context of raising educational performance. The LEA has already identified two areas of primary surplus places with population stability and no projected roll rise and is preparing to address these through the school organisation committee.

115. The LEA worked with schools to develop a class size plan, mainly rationalising Standard Numbers, supported by both capital and revenue grant. Most schools have at least one mixed-age class in Key Stage 1. The decrease in the number of classes of over 30 has been rapid, from 23 per cent in 1996 to 9 per cent in January 1998 and 3 per cent in January 2000.

Admissions

116. The LEA carries out this function satisfactorily. It inherited a complex range of admissions policies for secondary schools. Each primary school was previously allowed to determine its own policy for admission into reception and this caused confusion and inequity across the LEA. Members led wide consultation and then took clear decisions with the aim of improving education across the city.

117. The new secondary admissions policy is clear and consistent and aims to strengthen links between primary and secondary schools. Initial allocations are based on home addresses rather than the primary school attended, although a transitional phase will also recognise current sibling links. Some parents, however, are not clear that they can still express a preference for any school.

118. The new primary admissions policy is appropriate, bringing coherence to a previously diverse picture. The policy was the subject of extensive debate and the close involvement of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership. It is innovative in deciding that, from September 2003, all pupils will start school full-time in the term

after they are five, whilst developing a range of early years provision in schools and other settings, and a Foundation stage. Most schools visited expressed support for the principle and had confidence in the LEA's ability to work in partnership to implement it. There was, however, some unease about implementation. The needs of young pupils with statements of SEN in both special and mainstream settings require careful consideration.

119. The LEA has set up an admissions forum and provided clear admissions information to parents in setting out the complex current arrangements. Around 94 per cent of pupils attended their first choice school in 1999. Most appeals are dealt with by the June preceding the pupil's entry. However, the growing number of appeals and the proportion of those that were successful were partly related to the confusing admissions criteria and inconsistency in their implementation. The LEA is addressing these through the admissions policy to take effect from 2001.

120. The School Organisation Plan identifies that the SEN review will consider arrangements for the special schools and their range, given the increase in pupils with PMLD and the increasing inclusion in mainstream of pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and EBD. The growth in numbers of dual-registered pupils has not yet been matched by clarity about funding and roll allocations in the LEA's plans.

Provision for Education Otherwise Than at School

121. Provision for excluded pupils is very good. Exclusions, which were relatively high, have reduced significantly in recent years, falling to 37 pupils in 1998/9, with only four permanent exclusions so far in the current academic year. The LEA has worked hard to increase the provision made for excluded pupils, which is currently for 80 per cent of the week, with a target to raise this to 100 per cent by September 2000. Re-integration rates are high, well above the national average, and the incidence of re-exclusions is very low. In one secondary school, for example, targeted support from the behaviour support service (BSS) helped the school move from being the highest excluding school in York to having no exclusions in the last academic year. Schools have been trained in the use of pastoral support Programmes that are now in place for all pupils in secondary schools.

122. The pupil support centre (PSC) is effective in supporting both longer term and short term excluded pupils and non-attenders. It also oversees the monitoring of the 140 pupils who receive some form of alternative education. Its success is built upon a comprehensive database that monitors the status and progress of a wide range of pupils. Sophisticated and detailed analyses, drawing upon expert educational psychologist input, are undertaken of pre- and post-exclusion profiles for individual pupils. The number of pupils staying in the PSC as long stay referrals is rising, reflecting a growing complexity of needs. A wide range of provision is made available for some 222 pupils in Key Stage 4, usually Year 11, which includes work-related learning opportunities and builds on very good collaborative planning with the local further education college.

Attendance

123. Attendance in City of York schools is above, and unauthorised absence below, the national average. The education social work service (ESWS) is effective and is held in high regard by the schools. The ESWS is instrumental in leading integrated approaches to tackling family difficulties and poor attendance. However, despite its effective work and well-qualified staff, the service level agreements lack sufficient detail and service specifications are poorly defined. Electronic registers have been successfully introduced in many schools, helping them to identify and respond quickly to developing absence patterns. They have also aided the work of the ESWS in targeting schools and particular pupils whose absence is of concern. The service links effectively with other agencies and pioneered the Truancy Watch scheme with the local police.

Behaviour Support

124. The behaviour support plan is a coherent and comprehensive document that draws together a very wide range of projects and initiatives. There is a willingness to experiment and to support school initiatives, but this places very heavy demands on the management of the BSS. The recent amalgamation of customer services, BSS and ESWS has provided excellent opportunities to integrate the work of the three services. There remains a need to address strategic management and the capacity to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the LEA's policies. For example, important work on evaluating the differing costs of provision against their educational outcomes is only just beginning. Nevertheless the targets identified in the Behaviour Support Plan are all on course to be achieved and in some cases have been achieved ahead of time.

125. The pressure on support centre provision for EBD is growing, especially at Key Stage 3 where plans exist to create a new 'revolving door', short stay, unit. This has the potential to provide a valuable service and the proposal to fund it through mainstream school contributions is now based on the necessary, medium term, contractual arrangements with schools. The support centres serving primary age EBD pupils are successful but, particularly at Key Stage 2, are in heavy demand. Their capacity to make an early impact to prevent poor behaviour patterns becoming established are sometimes hampered by over-lengthy referral procedures.

126. The BSS was viewed positively in the school survey and in all mainstream schools visited during the inspection, although its staff is in high demand and cannot always respond as quickly, or as fully, as schools would like. Its tutors are expert and well trained and a skilled team of LSAs supports them. Much good work has been achieved with the specialist educational psychologists and successful whole-school training, particularly in assertive discipline and behaviour modification, has been provided. Good preventative work has been undertaken that is beginning to bring about long term institutional change. This is aided by, for example, the accredited course for teachers with responsibilities for inclusion.

127. The outcomes of the LEA's strategy for behaviour support are beginning to manifest themselves in its work. The number of EBD pupils placed outside the City

has fallen from 37 to 14, and although the number of statements maintained for pupils with EBD has remained fairly constant, they have fallen year on year as a proportion of all statements maintained. School inspection reports judged behaviour in York schools to be at least satisfactory; it was good or better in half of the schools inspected. Prudent forecasting and careful management will be required to ensure that raised expectations are not dashed by projects ending with insufficient consideration given to exit strategies.

Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection

128. The LEA issues appropriate guidance and model procedures to schools for buildings and staff issues. There are appropriate monitoring, reporting and recording procedures, including reports to the Health and Safety Executive.

129. Children's welfare and protection are prime concerns of the local authority. They are supported by clear policies and guidelines and through very good liaison with health, community services and the police. The Safer York Partnership brings together all interested parties and, in addition to funding projects, retains an overview of welfare and protection issues. The area child protection committee operates efficiently and has drawn on the lessons learned from the National Children's Bureau research project. Teachers are well trained, procedures are clear and operate effectively. Associated teams, such as the drug action team and the youth offending team, are integrated well, capitalising on the relatively small size of the local authority through speedy communication and joint planning.

Looked After Children

130. The provision for children looked after by the local authority is a major strength of the LEA's work. The lead given by Members and the care taken by officers in both the Education and community services departments has secured a high level of provision with a clear focus on the educational attainment and social inclusion of these children. The authority is responsible for 72 children in its care and has been successful in reducing the number of such children by encouraging permanent adoption. The 12 children maintained in local authority homes are housed in small units designed to provide a high standard of care for family size groups. Each child has a designated officer to act as advocate on matters relating to education and attainment and a very good contact network has been established between foster-carers, residential social workers and schools. LEA specialists, including educational social workers and educational psychologists, are deployed effectively in line with children's needs.

Ethnic Minority Children (including travellers)

131. The support for children of ethnic minority heritage, including Travellers' children, is good. The Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Grant is targeted to give direct support to 100 of the 210 York children who have English as an additional language. Targets for achievement of these pupils are ambitious, with a target for 62 per cent to achieve five A*-C grades at GCSE in 2002, and for 84 per cent to achieve Level 4 and above in literacy and 80 per cent to reach or exceed this

level in mathematics. Achievement of Travellers' children is rising at Key Stages 1 and 2, reflecting the centrality of educational achievement in the service's work.

132. The services are not delegated to schools, being below the threshold necessary for delegation, both in the current year and in 2000/2001. The small number of pupils involved makes realistic target setting for particular ethnic groups difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, pupils' attainment is monitored. The work of both services is well regarded in schools because of their efficient and prompt responses to schools' needs. They have collaborated effectively, for example in responding to and meeting the needs of refugee children. The services are currently funded through a joint arrangement with North Yorkshire County Council but will become self-standing in April 2000 when their management will be brought together in an ethnic minority and Travellers service.

School Improvement

133. The access functions of the LEA are co-ordinated well with a clear focus on raising pupil attainment. The challenge now facing the LEA is to consolidate their planning and management structures. A more systematic evaluation is needed of the effectiveness of the different strands of policies.

Social Exclusion

134. The City of York is determined to combat social exclusion. Council policy is clear and uncompromising; it translates itself into education targets for inclusion and high attainment for all pupils. Through the social inclusion task group, successful and innovative multi-agency approaches have been adopted. These seek to eradicate overlapping or conflicting initiatives and identify where dislocations or gaps in provision occur. A wide range of public sector, voluntary and private sector organisations have been encouraged to work together to find positive strategies to tackle disaffection and prevent social exclusion. For example, the joint consultative committee has recently set up a joint assessment project to research areas in which assessment may be duplicated and to streamline systems.

135. The York East Partnership project has brought together community-focused groups to tackle issues of inclusion in one of the more socially disadvantaged areas of the city. Imaginative working across public, private and voluntary sectors, including involvement with the DfEE Schools Plus programme, are features of this project. A regeneration project in another disadvantaged area of the city grew out of concern about crime and vandalism. Education and family support are central aims through increasing access to nursery provision, after school childcare, improved attainment in schools and improved adult literacy and numeracy

136. York is a largely mono-cultural city and this poses particular challenges to the Council's strategy to combat racism. The Building Bridges project has given a strong lead on race issues and good examples of the use of Theatre In Education race projects were seen in three schools. However, the LEA does not gather data on racial incidents, although plans are being made to address this. The lack of monitoring is a weakness, but overall the LEA strategy of managing racial matters,

as part of its broader thrust for social inclusion, is operating successfully.

Recommendations

In order to sustain the wide range of behaviour initiatives that the LEA deems important, the LEA should:

- reflect the separate demands of the strategic and operational management of the amalgamated behaviour support service in the new management structure.

In order to improve strategic planning to combat racism, the LEA should:

- expedite their plans to gather data on racial incidents and use the data to inform the strategic planning.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve further the strategic planning for school improvement:

- where the LEA's evaluations of projects with short-term funding are positive, fuller consideration should be given to how the work might be embedded in existing practice once external funding ceases.

In order to clarify funding for SEN:

- the review of the funding formula for schools, particularly for special schools, units and resource bases in mainstream schools, should be linked with the SEN review.

In order to improve standards in IT capability and the use of ICT in teaching and learning, the LEA should:

- increase the level of curriculum support available to schools;
- closely check schools' readiness for NOF training against the progress of their ICT development plans.

In order to improve the support for schools experiencing difficulties the LEA should:

- develop the procedures for identifying and reviewing the level of intervention needed in schools experiencing difficulty to ensure that, where necessary, support for headteachers is more tightly focused on detailed issues of leadership and management, and that exit strategies are clearer.

In order to improve the support for ICT in administration, the LEA should:

- expedite the plans to enable efficient electronic data transfer, including the standardisation of software for this purpose.

In order to improve strategic planning for SEN, the LEA should:

- develop a management structure for SEN that gives a proper separation of management functions and enables budget managers to discharge their duties effectively.

In order to meet statutory requirements for SEN, the LEA should:

- address with some urgency the mismatch between statements that name unit places, and the availability of such places.

In order to ensure the best use of delegated funds for SEN, the LEA should:

- give clear advice to governing bodies about monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the use of these funds.

In order to sustain the wide range of behaviour initiatives that the LEA deems important, the LEA should:

- reflect the separate demands of the strategic and operational management of the amalgamated behaviour support service in the new management structure.

In order to improve strategic planning to combat racism, the LEA should:

- expedite their plans to gather data on racial incidents and use the data to inform the strategic planning.

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