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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
ROTHERHAM
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This report details the findings of a short inspection conducted in June 2001 under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the progress made in responding to the findings and the recommendations of the previous inspection, which took place in November 1999. The inspection took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. This second inspection has followed up the progress of the LEA in implementing the post-inspection action plan and its Education Development Plan (EDP). It also evaluated the progress made by the LEA in supporting the central government initiatives of Excellence in Cities and the extension of Fair Funding.

3. The inspection was conducted by a small team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), two additional inspectors and an inspector from the Audit Commission. The inspection involved scrutinising documentation and interviewing elected members, the executive director of education, culture and leisure, senior officers and inspectors. Discussions were held with a representative of the social services department, with representative groups of governors, headteachers and special needs co-ordinators and with external partners. A questionnaire referred to as the school survey, inviting comments on LEA support was sent to all schools and replies were received from 71 per cent of them. Account was also taken of evidence from other divisions within OFSTED.

COMMENTARY

4. OFSTED and the Audit Commission inspected Rotherham LEA in November 1999. The report, which appeared in February 2000, was highly critical. It referred to fundamental weaknesses in corporate leadership, management and budgeting, to inadequacies in service specifications and performance management, to under funding of schools and a failure to challenge them and, finally, to weaknesses in the provision for the most vulnerable children, including a lack of strategy for special educational needs (SEN) and inadequate performance of the authority's role as corporate parent. Schools were not criticised. They were doing satisfactorily and in some respects well, without adequate support from the LEA. Compared to national figures, since the inspection improvement rates are broadly similar at GCSE level but significantly higher in end of Key Stage 2 tests.

5. The council's initial reaction to the report was one of disbelief and denial - a reaction that lasted for some time. However, a consultancy report, jointly commissioned by the council and the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), convinced the council that it needed to make a significant shift, from a view of its role which focused unduly on the provision of services to a more specific concentration on its ambitions for the people of Rotherham.

6. In order to implement that cultural change, new personnel were needed. Just eighteen months following the previous inspection, there are new people in the key posts of chief executive, leader of the council and the complete education senior management team. These appointments have been made from strong national fields and is further evidence of a departure from the insular and inward-looking approach reported previously.

7. These changes took some time to bring about. As a result, the sea-change in attitudes needed across the council and in education has begun but is not yet completed. Education is now the council's top priority and the council itself is beginning to operate as a corporate entity, rather than a loose confederation of largely disconnected departments. Within education there is more drive, better planning - exemplified in the revised Education Development Plan (EDP) - and greater openness in the approach to schools. Excellence in Cities (EiC) has improved collaborative working with schools.

8. The new senior management of the LEA has quietly established its credibility with schools, and is looking to find new ways, including collaboration with the private sector, of improving what is, in many respects, impoverished provision. Satisfactory progress has been made in 16 of the 19 recommendations made in the last inspection by OFSTED and the Audit Commission. Schools are becoming more involved in, and better informed about, the budget-setting process; the LEA is challenging them more. Funding has improved. Service specifications are better, and asset management is now good. Some of the elements of a strategy for SEN are in place, and provision for children in public care is much improved. Nevertheless weaknesses remain. Performance management is not yet securely in place; the management of information is unsatisfactory and there are weaknesses in the strategy for information and communication and technology (ICT).

9. It follows that, though there have been considerable and worthwhile improvements, they are not secure. The use of external consultants has helped significantly to identify weaknesses and develop strategies to remedy them, but has led to slippage in meeting deadlines, for instance production of a strategic plan for ICT. Progress on producing a corporate plan was initially poor, but has been rapid following a consultancy report and the arrival of the new chief executive. A good deal of fundamental work has yet to be completed. In education itself, the schools have yet to be convinced that cultural change is embedded throughout the organisation. They are fully convinced of the competence of the executive director and the good intentions of her senior colleagues, but in relation to day-to-day issues that matter to them, such as securing support for disruptive pupils, many still encounter official attitudes governed mainly by concern for compliance.

10. OFSTED ended its last report with the damning words, "We doubt that the LEA has the range of management expertise needed to undertake reconstitution successfully". In general, we no longer believe this to be the case, though we do think that the LEA will need from time-to-time to look outside itself for advice. Given the turmoil Rotherham has been through, the progress made has been as much as could have been expected in the time available. An early further inspection would certainly not be helpful. The LEA needs to do the considerable work of consolidation that is now required.

SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

Update

11. There has been little change in the socio-economic context of the LEA since the previous inspection in 1999; for instance, unemployment is still nearly double the national average. Earnings are low compared with national figures, and the area qualifies for financial assistance through European Union Objective One status. Rotherham ranks as the 50th most deprived local authority area in England.

12. The 43,500 children of school age include 4.1 per cent of minority ethnic heritage. Twenty four per cent of primary pupils and 19.1 per cent of secondary pupils take up free school meals compared with national figures of 19.7 and 17.6 per cent, respectively. There are 3.2 per cent (national 2.7 per cent) of pupils with special education needs in primary schools and 3.8 per cent (national 4.0 per cent) in secondary schools. Three-quarters of three year-old children and virtually all four year-old children participate in early years education.

13. The LEA maintains three nurseries, 110 primary, 17 secondary and seven special schools. Since the last inspection, one pupil referral unit (PRU) has closed and there are now two remaining.

Performance

14. OFSTED data indicates that attainment on entry to primary schools is below the national average. In most respects, attainment at all key stages is in line with statistical neighbours, but below the national average. For 1999/2000, improvement rates were above the national rate in primary schools and broadly similar in secondary schools.

15. In 2000, the percentages of pupils gaining Level 4 or higher in the end of Key Stage 2 tests were close to the national average in mathematics and science. Over the period 1998-2000, the LEA had the third highest improvement of all English LEAs in the English and mathematics results. Since the last inspection, the gap with national figures has reduced significantly for all three core subjects.

16. There is a dip in performance in the end of Key Stage 3 tests; for all three core subjects results are approximately five per cent below the national average. Since the inspection, attainment has risen in mathematics and science, but declined by three per cent in English. At GCSE level, results are in line with those of statistical neighbours. In 2000, 41.5 per cent of pupils gained five or more higher grades compared to 48.1 per cent, nationally. However, the percentage gaining at least one graded result is very close to the national average. For 1999/2000, improvements at GCSE level are broadly similar to national rates.

17. OFSTED inspection evidence shows that the percentage of primary schools judged overall to be 'good' or 'very good' is in line with similar authorities, but below the national average. The percentage of secondary schools in these categories is above the average for similar authorities and nationally; the proportion requiring improvement is half that nationally.

18. Attendance and truancy rates are close to national averages. For 1999/00, attendance in primary schools improved at the same rate as nationally, but was higher in secondary schools. Permanent exclusions are below the national average in primary schools and well below the national average in secondary schools; in 1999/2000 the reduction in exclusions was greater than nationally.

19. At the time of the previous inspection one primary school was judged to require special measures and five schools had serious weaknesses. The position has improved and there are now no schools in special measures and two with serious weaknesses.

Council and education department structure

20. The council has 66 elected members: 58 Labour (the whip is withdrawn from one member), four Conservatives, three Independent and one John Lilburne Party. In the May 2000 elections, there was a small change and a new Leader of the council was elected. A modernised council structure came into force in 1999, including a cabinet and separate education cabinet. Since the inspection, education issues have been debated in a public forum, as a result of the council's wish to be more open.

21. The authority has five scrutiny committees and one of these has a role which includes education. A consultancy report in November 2000 was critical of scrutiny procedures and the LEA has recognised the need to strengthen these. This remains the case. The role of scrutiny is not well understood by all members and the committee provides insufficient independent question and challenge to policies made by the cabinet. The decision to increase the representation of elected members on the scrutiny panel improves opportunities for the involvement of backbenchers but does not address this fundamental issue.

22. Rotherham's services were historically delivered by separate departments but were reorganised into five programme areas, including education, culture and leisure services, just before the last inspection. Since then there has been a further re-organisation in response to a critical management consultancy report. A new executive director was appointed for January 2001 after a spell in an acting capacity. The role of assistant director has been re-defined and, in line with the new emphasis, they are now designated as strategic leaders.

23. The last inspection reported serious weaknesses in the management and quality of the LEA's management services. A further inspection by management consultants confirmed this view. The LEA has followed the consultant's advice and in November 2000 established a new post, head of managed services. The postholder attends the department's senior management team meetings. Separately and, again in line with the consultant's report, a brokerage, independent of the LEA, was set up in February 2001.

24. In just over a year since the inspection team reported, the consequence of the above changes is that there are new people in the key posts of chief executive, leader of the council and the complete education senior management team. The

authority has acted decisively and promptly to bring in new blood. All but one of these new appointments are drawn from outside the borough, and the LEA has responded positively to the charge that it has been too insular and inward-looking. This is indicative of the fundamental change in attitudes that is taking place in the council.

Recommendation:

- define clearly the role of the scrutiny committee, and increase the rigour for scrutiny of policies and independent questioning of cabinet decisions.

Funding

25. The previous inspection pointed out the serial under-funding of education in Rotherham, and recommended a funding review in the light of a rigorous analysis of need and the council's priorities. In response, the council has stated boldly that education is its top priority and consequently expectations have been raised. Although satisfactory progress has been made, there is no room for complacency.

26. The overall education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Rotherham is below average¹ and considerable cuts in services and aspirations have had to be made to set recent budgets. However, in the last two years, expenditure on education has been increased to, or slightly above, SSA. This is a considerable improvement and is appreciated by headteachers who see this as tangible evidence that the council is treating education as a priority. As a result of the decision this year to top-slice school budgets to access Standards Fund and the necessary move to a new funding formula, headteachers do not perceive a significant increase in purchasing power.

27. Some modest extra funding for secondary schools from in-year savings, indicates the council's determination to raise secondary schools' funding whenever possible. A similar commitment has been shown by the council in identifying a variety of funding streams which, over the next five years, aim to address the £60 million needed to implement the asset management plan (AMP).

¹ Unless otherwise stated, 'average' relates to metropolitan authorities.

SECTION 2: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The response to the first OFSTED report

28. The previous inspection reported in February 2000 that Rotherham LEA had many weaknesses. Strategic management was largely ineffective, leadership by elected members was poor and the report indicated that neither schools nor the inspection team had confidence that the LEA had the range of management expertise needed to undertake reconstruction successfully. There were serious weaknesses in the management and quality of the LEA's management services, the lack of coherent strategies for information and communication technology (ICT) and for special educational needs (SEN) and an inadequate corporate plan.

29. The report indicated that significant changes at a senior level were required. The DfEE facilitated considerable external help. This included:

- nominating an acting executive director and arranging advisory support for her;
- support for reviewing and revising the local management of schools (LMS) formula; and
- commissioning a management consultancy report.

The DfEE also urged that a brokerage system be set up on the advice of the management consultants.

30. The management consultant's report reinforced the judgement concerning the lack of corporate planning and poor corporate working, characterised by processes which tended to be top-down and fragmented. As a result, elected members commissioned a report by the improvement and development agency (IdEA) as part of the Local Government Improvement Programme. This report reaffirmed the widespread lack of confidence in the corporate management team. The LEA had not tackled the biggest challenge; that of fundamental cultural change. The report described it as 'insular, paternalistic and departmental'.

31. The council has taken appropriate steps to respond to the criticisms. Partly, this has been made possible by a fundamental change in attitude by leading elected members. This is evidenced by the appointment of key senior personnel from outside the borough, embracing the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and a robust approach to the removal of surplus places. The council is now more outward-looking and willing to compare its own performance with that of others. It has education as a top priority and a commitment to fund education at SSA. The use of external consultants has helped significantly to identify weaknesses and develop strategies to remedy them but has led to slippage in meeting deadlines. Progress has also been inhibited by the very high turnover in senior staff in the education department and the chief executive's office.

32. The action plan addresses each of the 19 recommendations, but has significant weaknesses. It was constructed in a vacuum of corporate planning and with the majority of the current education senior management team not in place. Hence, it is a short-term fire-fighting tool that guided the restructuring of the programme area and the appointment of strategic leaders, but is weak on detail

relevant to improving provision. A significant number of the activities listed in the plan have not been carried out; deadlines have been missed. However, the recommendations relating to school improvement are incorporated into a good quality EDP. Progress with implementing the action plan has been reported regularly to a monitoring board and to elected members and a monitoring board comprising headteachers, governors, DfES representative and management consultants.

33. The previous inspection, and subsequent reports by external consultants, identified serious shortcomings in corporate processes and planning, some of which have been listed previously. The OFSTED report recommended the production of a corporate plan and the use of external advice to streamline and improve the effectiveness of planning.

34. The council has responded energetically to the recommendation, but progress has been mixed. The LEA has used external consultants, and acted decisively on their advice. Progress on producing a corporate plan has been unsatisfactory overall, and the target date of November 2000 has been missed by at least seven months. Use of information remains a weakness and partly stems from the flawed council decision to leave vacant a senior information post in the education programme area. The new chief executive has instilled a new sense of urgency. Rapid progress has been made in the last four months on a broad front including the corporate plan. He has provided the expertise and leadership needed to steer developments and an appropriate emphasis on a team approach. There is now a shared vision between the chief executive, leader of the council and senior officers that has been sadly missing in the past. This unified approach is recognised and welcomed by the schools.

35. There have been recent improvements in service level planning. The education department has combined these into a development plan. This is useful and is helping to synchronise corporate and departmental planning. There has not been time to use these service objectives to devise targets for individuals and groups below head of service level, but there are plans to do so.

36. A discussion paper for a corporate plan has been produced, which outlines the broad direction over the next three years. It identifies six priorities, one of which is appropriately dedicated to education. It is recognised that these priorities will need further work and consultation over the coming weeks and months. Simultaneously, a community plan is being developed. The LEA has ensured that there is consistency in the use of performance indicators across a range of plans including the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). It is not yet in a position to ensure coherence between all major plans, but a momentum has been established to rectify this.

37. External consultants reported that there were no clear appraisal arrangements for the corporate management team, and few programme area heads worked to individual objectives or clear targets. There are still weaknesses in performance management; they are being addressed but this initiative is at an early stage. All senior managers are scheduled to undergo performance review in September, which is linked to the Investors in People scheme. Arrangements are sensible: there is a

planned programme of training and use is to be made of good practice in the social services programme area.

38. The council has adopted an innovative strategy to support the above initiatives. It has given a major role to a newly constituted 'improvement team', comprising seven officers, selected one from each programme area, on the basis of their acknowledged effectiveness. This venture is expensive, but fully supported by elected members, and it demonstrates the commitment of the council, not only to bring about improvement, but also to build on success. The team is charged with collecting information on a quarterly basis, promoting accountability of individual programme areas and supporting the implementation of the performance management system. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this strategy, but a good start has been made in linking with education and achieving a common purpose.

Recommendations:

- complete and implement the corporate plan;
- ensure that strategic, operational, service and programme area plans are coherent and are targeted clearly on meeting the LEA's aims; and
- complete and implement a performance management system.

Education department strategy

39. The previous inspection found that the leadership provided by elected members was poor and that by senior officers was unsatisfactory. The report recommended that councillors and senior officers should clarify the direction of the education service and develop a climate of co-operation amongst all stakeholders. Progress is sound, despite the difficulties caused by the complete reconstruction of the senior management team.

40. Structural reorganisations affecting education are outlined in paragraph 22. The new executive director has made a significant impact in a comparatively short time. She is well regarded by the schools and is perceived as being open, having the courage to make difficult decisions and providing effective leadership. The strategic leaders are too recently appointed to measure their effectiveness. They have made a sound start, but are all relatively inexperienced for their current roles. This is recognised by the executive director who is arranging appropriate support and opportunities to observe good practice elsewhere.

41. The quality of planning is mixed, and progress has been inhibited by the high turnover in key staff. The action plan is weak and the education strategic plan (ESP) mechanistic and of limited value. The latter refers to a time period of 2001 to 2004, but has been overtaken by events. It will need to be revised to detail plans for areas of work not contained in the EDP, for instance, early years, lifelong learning and management services. These plans were created soon after the OFSTED inspection and recent plans are of much better quality. The most recent EDP is good; the development plan is still in draft, but has the potential to address the shortcomings in the ESP.

42. Members are better informed than previously about the work of schools, their quality and the standards they achieve. They are regularly briefed by the executive director. The change in culture has been commented on previously and is exemplified most notably by the leader of the council. This is appreciated by the schools, but there is still some scepticism whether this culture has permeated throughout the council. The cabinet member for education has forged good, constructive working relationships with senior officers.

43. After a faltering start with its primary schools, the LEA has made good progress to reach a position where there is a sound partnership with all phases. Schools report that the arrangements are largely unchanged but that consultation is now more effective. The LEA makes sound use of focus groups that includes headteacher representatives. Communication with secondary schools is most effective because the LEA can link into the programme of regular meetings for the 17 headteachers. In 2000, there was only one meeting between the executive director and the primary headteachers. The LEA is attempting to use the cluster meetings of primary headteachers to promote better consultation. This initiative has potential, but is not sufficiently well defined or co-ordinated to achieve the LEA's worthy aims. Chairs of governing bodies report that they are consulted well, and due attention is paid to their views.

44. There has been a robust dialogue between the schools and officers and the journey has been a difficult one at times. This was reflected in the school survey in February 2001. There were tensions with secondary schools over budget issues and the picture with primary schools was a bleak one. The primaries rated consultation as unsatisfactory and worse than at the time of the previous inspection. This corresponded to a time of maximum uncertainty, with key staff not appointed and the provision for managed services still to be resolved. Discussions with over 50 headteachers revealed a positive position by June. Senior officers are promoting a climate of mutual trust through their openness and responsiveness to concerns. Some weaknesses remain. For instance, despite its good quality, schools do not identify with the EDP because of their limited involvement in its production. This is understandable, because the requirement to achieve results to a very tight deadline has limited opportunities for effective consultation. This should be remedied for the revised EDP for 2002 onwards.

Recommendation:

- revise the procedures for consultation with primary schools and ensure that there is effective feedback on decisions taken.

Management support services

45. The previous report recommended, firstly, that schools should be offered greater choice and flexibility in order to ensure greater incentive to secure cost effectiveness in bought-back services and to help them exercise their autonomy. Secondly, that the pricing and service specifications for delegated services should be reviewed and improved. A further management consultancy report recommended the appointment of a senior officer to drive this work forward in the LEA, and the establishment of an external brokerage service to provide greater choice for schools. Satisfactory progress has been made on all counts.

46. The head of managed services took up post in November 2000 and has embarked on a considered and vigorous strategy to modify the deep-seated 'provider' culture in the council, into a more customer-focused approach. This is beginning to have a discernible effect, and was commented on favourably by headteachers; senior officers recognise that there is much still to do in driving such change into all parts of the organisation.

47. Schools now have a portfolio of council services with a reasonable degree of choice, and a simple statement of service specification, which acts as a basic service level agreement (SLA). Unfortunately, materials arrived late in schools, although newsletters kept schools abreast of developments and, given the imminent availability of externally brokered services, there was some confusion as to the status of the SLAs. These problems have been accepted and plans are well advanced to resolve them. However, the cost of the simplest buy-back option is equal to the sum delegated. This, combined with a lack of certainty that the full costs of services have been delegated, is unsatisfactory and prevents schools making valid comparisons of alternative provision.

48. The external brokerage service has engaged with schools in raising awareness of procurement issues linked to individual school needs, and a brochure of providers will be available from September. However, timing has not been helpful in school planning, and there is confusion about the position of the LEA's own services, and their likely costs if provided through the broker. The close partnership working between the LEA and the brokerage service envisaged in the external consultancy report is not apparent.

Recommendations:

- the LEA and the broker should jointly provide schools with unequivocal notification of the arrangement for procuring management services from the authority; and
- services should be traded at full cost and a staged approach to separating delegated amounts from costs should be agreed with schools.

Allocation of resources to priorities

49. The previous report criticised Rotherham for not basing its resource allocation on an analysis of need. The absence of corporate and other plans has meant that priorities were obscure, and resulted in an incremental, historical basis for budget setting.

50. Progress has been sound and the allocation of resources to priorities has more strengths than weaknesses. Objectives within the draft corporate plan and the targets set out in the BVPP will be used to guide the deployment of resources for the 2002/03 budget. Senior education officers are gradually acquiring more secure financial data analyses, and are using these to inform debates and briefings for headteachers and elected members. Members, in turn, are gaining a much clearer picture of the needs of their customers and services by sitting on various strategic working parties. Officers and elected members will thus be in a much stronger position to promote education during the development of next year's budget.

51. Some significant achievements have been secured. A mechanism for funding schools has been introduced so that they are no longer funded on actual teachers' salaries. A sensible cushioning mechanism has been introduced to lessen the turbulence, and officers are making every effort to increase schools' understanding of formula funding by, for example, offering workshop sessions for headteachers and governors. Such openness is a welcome innovation in Rotherham and much appreciated by schools. However, some weaknesses remain; budget share notification documents are still obscure and do not enable schools to assess the basis of their allocation. Officers accept this criticism, and more transparent models have already been produced and will be provided next year.

52. Figures for 2000/01, show that at £1770 per pupil, Rotherham's primary individual schools budget (ISB) is above statistical neighbours but below metropolitan borough and national norms, whereas at £2390 per pupil, the secondary ISB is below all these norms. The financial position of schools is improving; the number of secondary schools with deficits has been reduced from 13 to six, and only ten primaries showed a deficit last year, the largest being four per cent of its budget.

53. With the caveats related to accounting mentioned below, the budget for central retention of funds for 2000/01 was below average at £339 per pupil compared to £425. Budgets for most Fair Funding categories were in line with other authorities; an exception was for Standards Fund where around £25 per pupil more than average was retained. Comparative figures for the current year are not available at the time of inspection. Although the level of delegation quoted by the LEA and verified by the DfES, is 88.9 per cent, the figure overstates the case. Money to provide free school meals for children (about £1.5 million) has not been fully delegated, even though it is recorded as such. Good progress has been made in clarifying the status of a further £5.5 million which was charged to education but managed by other departments. Arrangements are now in place to involve education more appropriately in such expenditure. These two examples illustrate the lack of transparency resulting from some of the council's arcane accounting procedures. These have not kept pace with the changing structures of departments and they are at best an impediment, and at worst an embarrassment to officers who are trying to engage stakeholders in detailed discussions about financial issues.

54. The LEA has made unsatisfactory progress in identifying schools' notional special needs budgets, and this is examined further in Section 5 of this report. No significant progress has been made in making available to schools benchmarking information about resource and staffing deployment as recommended in the last inspection.

Recommendations:

- the intention to build next year's budget around the corporate and BVPP should be taken forward with urgency;
- accounting procedures should be modified to reflect current structures and requirements;
- school budget notification material and Part 4 of the Section 52 return should mirror each other and enable the reader to check budget formulation and accuracy; and
- improve schools' ability to analyse their own spending patterns by providing or recommending appropriate benchmarking materials.

Best Value

55. Rotherham made a poor start to the introduction of Best Value (BV). The over-ambitious programme of 26 reviews resulted in only three being completed. This shortcoming has been accepted by the new council leader in a refreshingly candid introductory section to the new and more achievable BVPP. He has also provided a useful, frank critique of the completed reviews for other elected members.

56. Structures are still unsatisfactory, but progress is being made. The more positive approach adopted by the new leader and chief executive provides hope for the future. The council has taken positive action to implement the recommendations made by the district auditor (DA). There are pockets of good BV practice in areas such as performance management, appraisal and client feedback, but there is no unifying framework to pull these strands together. The appointment of a senior officer with a brief to improve performance reviews is timely, but as the post-holder had not started at the time of inspection, no impact was evident.

57. Governors do not report to the LEA how they will apply BV principles in running schools. The intention is that as the brokerage service come on stream, BV will be promoted. However, this is unlikely without their knowledge of BV principles being increased beyond the more fundamental aspects of value for money which brokerage will bring.

Recommendations:

- the council should urgently address the shortcomings highlighted by agencies such as district audit in order to embed consistently Best Value policy and practice into all aspects of its operation; and
- provide sufficient information and advice about Best Value in order for schools to comply with their requirement to report how they will apply its principles to their practice.

Information and communication technology

58. The previous inspection report identified the need for:

- early and co-ordinated action to establish a coherent and integrated ICT strategy which takes full account of schools' needs;
- co-ordination of all the curricular and administrative strands in ICT; and

- a coherent system for recording data about individual exchange of date.

59. The external consultancy report in July 2000 revealed little change and examined the ICT strategy in more detail. The report identified further weaknesses in the ICT plan, multiple disconnected activities and an over-stretched ICT team. The consultants also facilitated an ICT conference in Summer 2000, giving schools an opportunity to express views about their ICT needs and potential ways forward. The consultants also proposed establishing a sub-regional strategy for ICT. This initiative faltered and, in part, has been a factor in delaying the LEA's response.

60. Overall, there has been satisfactory progress in developing a corporate ICT strategy, but it is not yet evident to schools. The strategic level of planning has been developed in conjunction with the South Yorkshire Learning Partnership. This has provided a steer for the council but progress was hindered by lack of effective leadership and by limited ICT expertise within the council. In recent months, rapid progress has been made in meeting the recommendation. The implementation statement on e-government is on track to be produced by July 2001. An ICT strategy team has been set up to bring together key players, including elected members. The team is effective and is driving through changes.

61. The issues of what data should be collected, the links between data systems and who needs access have not yet been adequately tackled. The LEA is not yet able to demonstrate that the policy accurately reflects schools' curricular and administrative needs. This is reflected by the negative views expressed by headteachers in the school survey and, albeit to a lesser extent, in discussions with the inspection team.

62. There is currently no central database for recording individual pupil data and the position is much as it was at the time of the last inspection. A comprehensive database is being developed in partnership with another LEA with nationally recognised good practice. Progress on this part of the recommendation is unsatisfactory, however, and there remains unnecessary duplication and inefficiency. Across the programme area, a number of bespoke systems hold information which is of value to a wider audience but is not shared.

63. Electronic exchange of data is not yet in place, but there has been more progress on this aspect. All schools are now on-line, and training in the use of internet is being provided and the LEA has established an intranet. This will enable the rapid transfer of data between the LEA and its schools. This, together with the Excellence in Cities (EiC) and EAZ initiatives, provides a sound platform for future developments.

Recommendations:

- improve the management of information across the borough; and
- establish a coherent information and communication technology system for the recording of data about individual pupils and improve arrangements for the electronic transfer of data both within the LEA and between the LEA and schools.

SECTION 3: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Education Development Plan (EDP)

64. At the time of the first inspection the EDP for 1999/2002 was poor. It was approved by the Secretary of State for one year only on condition that the LEA identified specific means of challenging and supporting schools with low targets in literacy and numeracy; improved procedures to identify and support schools causing concern, especially those not formally identified by OFSTED; formed clearer links between the audit of school performance and the school improvement actions, using more quantifiable success criteria; and removed activities which should be funded through delegation to schools. The LEA was addressing these issues, but weaknesses remained. The EDP had little influence on the schools' planning and was not aligned closely enough with other major education plans, making the coherence of overall planning weak. The inspection report recommended that EDP planning be improved.

65. The EDP has been completely rewritten and is now of good quality. It was first revised in April 2000 and then again in February 2001. The priorities for the remaining one year of the plan April 2001/2002 are raising attainment:

- in literacy;
- in numeracy;
- through the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative;
- for pupils with special educational needs;
- in information and communication technology;
- of underachieving pupils;
- by improving support for schools causing concern; and
- by building schools' capacity to be autonomous and self-improving.

66. The priorities are well chosen, reflect local and national priorities and derive very clearly from detailed audit. They are cross-referenced to both the last inspection and consultancy reports. The strategies for implementation are clearly defined and are appropriate. Success criteria are, in the main, quantified and supported by reasonable timescales and milestones, which enable progress to be measured accurately. Responsibilities are clearly identified and procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress with the EDP are sound. The EDP is costed rigorously and is feasible.

67. The targets for 2002 are challenging particularly at Key Stage 2 even though interim targets were set too low. The last report highlighted differences between the schools' aggregated literacy and numeracy targets and the LEA targets in the year 2000. Actual results for 2000 show that both the primary schools and the LEA have been too cautious; even the higher LEA targets were exceeded by 3.1 and 6.4 per cent for literacy and numeracy, respectively. The LEA has been successful in persuading schools to raise targets for 2001. In 2000, the LEA achieved all its EDP targets relating to attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 and at GCSE level, but narrowly missed targets for reducing exclusions and the percentage of unauthorised

absences in secondary schools. The revised EDP includes additional targets for pupils' attainment at Key Stages 1 and 3.

68. Work on revising the EDP began afresh in April 2000 on the arrival of the present executive director, who was employed in an acting capacity at that time. The deadline for submitting the revised EDP to the DfEE was June 2000. This was a very short timescale for a very substantial revision of a major plan, but one that the LEA achieved with some distinction. While representative groups of headteachers, governors and other stakeholders were consulted, it was sometimes at a relatively late stage in the proceedings and consultation was not as full or extensive as either the LEA would wish or good practice dictate. This is reflected in the school survey where many primary schools, in particular, do not feel they have been consulted well.

69. There are termly reports to the monitoring board and to the education cabinet. In addition, there was an evaluation report to the DfEE and internally on progress in the first year 1999/00. It is supplemented usefully by a report on examination performance in 2000.

70. The former EDP has been rightly abandoned. Consequently, some activities are at a fairly early stage of implementation while others are a continuation of strategies contained in earlier versions of the EDP. Progress with the priorities is reported below except for SEN which is analysed in section 5 of this report.

Support for literacy

71. The initial inspection noted that standards in literacy were low and, although they were improving, the LEA still had much to do to meet its 2002 target of 80 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 at Key Stage 2. The lack of an overall strategic plan to drive forward developments, as well as a lack of project co-ordination and evaluation, were weaknesses. Evidence suggested that where schools were targeted for intensive support there was improvement. However, the data available to the LEA was not being used effectively to ensure that support was targeted more directly to schools with the greatest need. The report recommended that LEA support programmes should be systematically evaluated to determine that they are effective and targeted best to meet needs.

72. The LEA is making sound progress towards meeting the expectations identified in the EDP. Standards at Key Stages 1 and 2 are rising, and in both 1999 and 2000 results exceeded the LEA Key Stage 2 target by over two percentage points. At Key Stage 1, there has been success in supporting improvements in writing, which is now in line with the average national test results. Reading results, however, continue to be below both those of similar authorities and results nationally. At Key Stage 2, in 2000 the LEA's results are in line with similar authorities although they are still below the national average. The 2002 target is still a challenging one. At Key Stage 3 there was a three per cent dip in results in 2000 and, while the results are in line with those in similar authorities, a widening gap has emerged between the LEA's results and the national average.

73. Satisfactory progress is being made to meet the recommendation. The greater availability of, and confidence in using, a range of data is facilitating a more detailed analysis of where support should be most effectively targeted. In addition, HMI reporting on the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in the LEA confirm that the management of the strategy has improved and that schools receiving intensive support are making good progress. However, progress on the establishment of an authority wide literacy strategy including family literacy and early years is slow. A systematic and rigorous process for monitoring and evaluating the impact on standards of the management and delivery of all support for literacy has not yet been secured either.

74. The school survey that accompanied this inspection indicates that primary schools in particular are less satisfied with support for literacy than they demonstrated in the previous survey. Interviews with headteachers confirm that while some headteachers continue to assess the support for literacy as good, especially the in-school support available to intensive schools, others are less confident about its relevance and effectiveness.

Recommendations:

- the draft LEA literacy strategy needs to be agreed as a matter of urgency; and
- the impact of the management and delivery of support for literacy across the key stages needs to be systematically monitored and evaluated.

Support for numeracy

75. Support to primary schools in raising standards of numeracy was identified as good at the time of the last report. One area of particular concern identified was the lack of specialist support for secondary mathematics teachers. At Key Stage 3, while the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 was in line with LEA neighbours it was below the national average.

76. Good progress continues to be made by the LEA in numeracy at both Key Stages 1 and 2. While results at Key Stage 1 are below the national average and that of similar authorities, the rate of improvement is greater than that nationally and the gap is closing. At Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 and above increased by seven percentage points and brought the LEA's results in line with those of similar authorities and nationally. In the light of the increasingly more detailed analysis of data being undertaken, together with discussions with schools, the LEA has increased its expectations and identified an ambitious, but achievable, target for 2002 of 81 percent. Key Stage 3 results also continue to rise and are in line with similar authorities, although below the national average.

77. The most recent school survey and discussions with headteachers demonstrate that the support for numeracy is increasingly highly valued by all schools. At the secondary level there has been good progress in meeting the recommendation to improve support for mathematics teaching. A new adviser with secondary expertise in mathematics took up post in September 2000 and there is clear evidence that his work with mathematics departments in all secondary schools has helped them to respond positively to the Key Stage 3 strategy.

Excellence in cities

78. Excellence in Cities (EiC) is priority 3 of the EDP, and the LEA regards it, not just as an important means of raising standards and improving quality, but as a way of improving some of the shortcomings identified in the overall working of the authority, such as the excessive dependency of schools on the LEA, its isolation and lack of innovation and its need for more inclusive practices.

79. Eight strands of activity are identified in the EDP:

- coordinating and developing the EiC activity;
- developing learning mentors;
- establishing learning support units (LSUs);
- developing provision for gifted and talented pupils;
- developing city learning centres (CLCs)
- developing strategies for the use of Beacon schools, small EAZs, specialist schools, best practice research;
- cross-phase liaison and continuity Y7-Y9; improving transfer from KS2 to KS 3; and
- positive engagement of post-16 pupils.

80. EiC is well managed and has been precisely what Rotherham needed. It has required the schools to assume much of the onus for management, and to do so collaboratively. The LEA, though represented on the partnership, has not been in the lead. This has required schools to innovate, seek out good practice and disseminate it. The introduction of learning mentors has opened schools up to the community, and opened teachers' minds to the value of working with other professionals.

81. The attitudinal shift involved in all this attracted widespread approval from teachers and headteachers. It is already apparent that the LEA, has consciously moved to more consultative styles. Some particular advantages for provision in schools are apparent. Firstly, introduction of learning mentors and LSUs has filled a gap in the LEA's previous pattern of support for behaviour. Fixed term exclusions have fallen considerably, and schools' pastoral systems have become tighter. Provision for children in public care has become more prominent, and has greatly benefited from the multi-agency interventions co-ordinated by one of the small EAZs. Data on the attainment of pupils in the participating primary schools was being collected at the time of this inspection, but early indications were that the targets would be met. Overall, aspirations for primary phase children have risen.

Support for information and communication technology in the curriculum

82. The previous inspection report identified the need within the EDP for a clearer ICT rationale, better defined tasks, and success criteria against which progress could be monitored and evaluated, and support for ICT in the curriculum to be targeted to the greatest needs.

83. There has been satisfactory progress in planning for ICT within the EDP, but weaknesses remain. The LEA has addressed the first part of this recommendation

well. The planning within the revised EDP is good and meets all the issues listed above. There are good links with the Excellence in Cities initiatives; one activity is devoted to developing ICT learning centres. As part of the success criteria there are challenging targets for enhancing pupils ICT skills.

84. The advisory service has been reorganised and systems have been improved to target support better, but are only just starting to be implemented. Continued use is also made of OFSTED school inspection reports. Progress in ICT has been hindered by the lack of an ICT adviser. This is reflected in the school survey where support for ICT in the curriculum was judged to be in the bottom 25 per cent of all LEAs surveyed. After four attempts, one was appointed just before the inspection and this has been welcomed by the headteachers.

Underachieving pupils

85. There are eight areas of focus under this priority. Progress on boys literacy is covered under Priority 1 and support for attendance and raising attainment of children in public care are within the section on Access of this report.

86. The previous inspection report identified the need to take better account of ethnic diversity and to promote attainment of all sections of the community. There are two activities within the EDP specifically targeted at removing barriers to the progress of minority ethnic pupils and to raising their attainment. They cover the review of policies and the receipt by the LEA of information regarding racial incidents. The LEA has recently launched two documents, 'education in a multi-cultural society' and 'combating racism'. However, the council for racial equality standards for schools, 'learning for all', have not been actively promoted by the LEA.

87. Racial incidents are monitored by schools and the information is collated. Not all schools have responded to the request for information and this issue is being reviewed. The racial equality council is involved through a project to develop a local profile with a view to proactive support in areas of concern. This initiative effectively strengthens the LEA's current approach.

88. Initiatives for raising the attainment of ethnic minority pupils in literacy and numeracy are being implemented effectively. In particular, the numeracy strategy has seen a marked improvement in minority ethnic pupil attainment in end of Key Stage 2 tests.

89. The corporate strategy is in line with the 'racial equality means quality' guidance, but recently this initiative has lost pace owing to the equal opportunities officer leaving the authority.

90. Progress with the recommendation is satisfactory and there are pockets of good practice. However, some weaknesses remain and there is a lack of a fully co-ordinated approach. In particular, the links are not sufficiently clear between the corporate strategy and the council for racial equality standards for schools and how policies are translated into the LEA's actions to raise standards.

Recommendation:

- improve and accelerate the co-ordination of, and actively promote, strategies to combat racism.

Support for schools causing concern

91. The first EDP was criticised for a lack of clarity in its procedures for dealing with schools causing concern. The LEA has responded successfully, drawing on good practice from other local authorities. Good use was made of a working group comprising headteachers with successful experience of managing schools in difficulties. New procedures have been produced which have been welcomed by the schools. Schools indicate that levels of additional support are clear and understood. There has been sound progress and the LEA has further improved its support for schools causing concern.

92. Since the last inspection, one school has been judged to require special measures. This was a pupil referral unit (PRU) with only four pupils. There was insufficient support from the LEA and the PRU was closed. There is substantial and appropriate support to other schools causing concern. The LEA has relatively few advisers but makes effective use of education consultants where there are gaps in its own expertise. Early indications are that the intervention policy is working. There are now only two schools in serious weaknesses and none in special measures, compared to six in these two categories in February 2000.

Raising schools' capacity to be autonomous and self-improving

93. The last inspection report and also the external consultant's report identified a dependency culture in the schools whose capacity to act as customers for services had not been developed. Most of the other aspects of LEA support for supported self-evaluation (SSE) was reported as at least sound. There was a sound strategy for guidance and challenge to target-setting, but weaknesses in the support for use of data in schools.

94. There has been satisfactory progress in developing schools as customers. A brokerage system has been established and this is examined in section one of this report. However, there has been unsatisfactory progress in other aspects of the recommendation. The main weakness relates to the use of performance data. The LEA has not developed systems to track pupil progress as reported earlier and this inhibits their ability to challenge schools' targets. There is very limited value-added analysis by the LEA. Schools report that there is insufficient expertise in the LEA to enable the schools to use available computer packages to develop their own pupil tracking procedures.

95. The LEA has made sound progress in other respects. It has developed guidance for self-evaluation, provided appropriate training and strengthened the challenge offered by link advisers.

96. The priority also contains activities to recruit good quality teachers, including newly qualified teachers (NQTs), and to promote the health school standard. The

LEA has used a good range of strategies to recruit and retain good quality teachers, but it is an emerging issue in a minority of schools. The induction programme for NQTs is good and there is good support for the professional development of primary headteachers. There is, however, no induction programme for newly-appointed headteachers and this is a weakness. Also, the theme on the quality of teaching does not give sufficient emphasis to establishing, monitoring procedures, although it is implied in adopting the OFSTED model for SSE.

Recommendation:

- devise and implement a strategy for the induction of new headteachers.

SECTION 4: OTHER SERVICES TO SUPPORT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, support, challenge and intervention

97. While the work of the advisory service was regarded as satisfactory overall at the time of the inspection, some key areas of concern were identified. In particular, the LEA was judged not to have satisfactorily established and implemented a shared understanding and definition of its role in monitoring, challenging, intervening and supporting schools. While clear descriptions of advisers' roles existed, in practice their work was variable in terms of the level of challenge and support provided to schools and it was not monitored sufficiently rigorously. The systems for identifying school performance were found to be generally sound, but the adviser time allocated to individual schools was not always objectively analysed or appropriately distributed. In the main, primary schools were well served, secondary schools had effective but patchy support, and special schools had both a dearth of challenge and support.

98. The complete structural reorganisation of the advisory service, implemented in April 2001, together with the introduction of a tariff system for identifying the level and nature of intervention and support required in a school, have been significant factors in developing a common understanding of the LEA's key monitoring, support, challenge and intervention functions. Strategic oversight and responsibility for the functions have been clearly and appropriately defined by creating two new principal adviser posts. Monitoring, evaluation and intervention are held in one post while support, through the co-ordination and integration of initiatives and the active management of development, is in the other. The new strategic leader together with the two principal advisers, are clear about their task and have already put in place a number of sound systems and processes to tackle the concerns addressed in the inspection report.

99. Criteria and grades, to aid identification of where there is need for LEA intervention and support, have been developed over the last year and are being implemented. Schools have been fully involved in the debate. There are separate criteria for primary, secondary and special schools that should enable key decisions to be made about the nature and appropriateness of the core and centrally funded support required. Through the separate brokerage service, schools will be free to buy additional support.

100. Changes to the service and arrangements for working with schools are sound and there is evidence of good progress towards refocusing the priorities of the advisory service. A training programme is being devised for the wider role carried out by advisers, but it needs to be strengthened and shared with schools to allay their concerns about cross-phase working by advisers. While there is a clear link between the work of the service and the EDP, the systems for monitoring the appropriateness and effectiveness of an individual's work have still to be tried and tested. In addition, while a system of work review is in place there is no performance management process that carefully targets priorities and development.

Recommendation:

- draw up a systematic and ongoing development programme for all advisers that is linked closely to their core responsibilities of monitoring and challenging schools.

Support for target-setting

101. At the time of the initial inspection the LEA was judged to be providing an effective service for the collection and analysis of data that was valued by schools. However, while training and advice was available for teachers and governors on the use of data for setting targets, detailed written guidance was not in place. In addition, the support provided for target-setting from individual liaison advisers was identified as inconsistent and on occasions lacking in rigour. There was a clear judgement, in the commentary of the inspection report, that the LEA's function to challenge schools in all aspects of their performance was not always being exercised adequately.

102. In order to make the setting of performance targets for pupils more efficient, the report made two recommendations. First, for written guidance to be prepared to help schools use data in target-setting and second, for liaison advisers to be trained to offer more consistent support and advice to help them set challenging but realistic targets.

103. Satisfactory progress has been made on both recommendations. However, the school survey and interviews with headteachers indicates that the LEA has some way to go to convince schools that their target setting has improved. There is an increasing understanding within schools and amongst officers of the centrality of an effective target-setting process to the raising of standards. Written guidance, drawn up in collaboration with headteachers, has been available to primary schools since the autumn term 2000. It has generally been welcomed by schools and is currently being modified to support a more challenging approach.

104. Written guidance for secondary schools has taken longer to produce, partly because secondary schools already had well established and individual approaches to collecting data. The importance of a consistent cross-phase approach to individual pupil tracking and development has required detailed discussion, and the expectation is that the final draft will be agreed to distribute ready for the autumn term. No written guidance is currently available for special schools although the authority is working with special school heads to agree how the value they add to pupils' progress can be assessed.

105. Training for advisers has been undertaken. They now feel well prepared to deal with this part of their work and are responding to the need to access and analyse data in a more regular and systematic way. The authority's slow progress on data collection, particularly of individual pupil level data, is hampering further progress.

Support for early years

106. The initial inspection judgements on early years education were positive. Inspectors noted good provision available for a high proportion of the authority's pre-

school aged children. It acknowledged that the LEA had recognised the importance of addressing the depressed level of attainment of pupils on entry by including early years within part of one of the priorities in the EDP. However, while the information for parents was good, arrangements for involving parents in the early assessment of their children were insufficiently well developed.

107. Good progress has been made in taking forward the recommendation. The LEA has reviewed the way it involves parents in the early assessment of their children and re-emphasised its commitment to this principle. The main framework guiding the authority's work in early years is its comprehensive and well used 'quality in action' framework, which includes guidance for the involvement of parents in assessment. Training to support quality in action has been organised for all providers. The baseline assessment scheme adopted by nearly all Rotherham primary and special schools reinforces the message of the importance of parental involvement and includes strategies for feeding back assessment outcomes to parents. Parents of children with special education needs are regarded as particularly important in the assessment process and the recent social inclusion documentation on early years reiterates how to manage this effectively.

SECTION 5: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

108. Provision for special educational needs constitutes priority 4 in the Education Development Plan. It was also an area in which significant issues needed to be addressed following the earlier OFSTED inspection. In particular, the following criticisms were made:

- there was a lack of overall strategic leadership;
- the LEA's strategy was weak;
- some of the recommendations of a district audit report had not been addressed;
- there was no unified SEN budget clearly identifying the amounts allocated for pupils with SEN in mainstream;
- the LEA did not provide guidance for schools in making resource decisions;
- school policy documents were not evaluated, and no effort was made to disseminate good practice; and
- too few statements were issued within the 18-week period.

109. The LEA has taken a great deal of action designed to meet OFSTED's criticisms of its lack of strategy for SEN. Those criticisms were amplified by a further report commissioned by the LEA, and by advice from management consultants. That report, and advice, suggested that the LEA needed to make a significant shift in attitude. Its tradition had been one of compliance, with most activity in the LEA focused on the drawing up of a statement for SEN, and making the associated provision. That stance left the LEA wholly at the mercy of inexorably rising demand for increasingly expensive provision. In general terms, the advice was that the LEA concentrate on the intended outcomes of provision, and that it formulate a view consistent with the thrust of Government policy on increasing inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

110. Progress is satisfactory. Although there is not yet a fully coherent SEN strategy, a great deal has been done to lay the foundations for it. A strategic manager has been put in post, with a steering group - the strategic group for SEN/inclusion. Considerable efforts are being made to consult schools over the emerging strategy and to implement appropriate procedures for consulting stakeholders, not least parents. Headteachers and others recognise and value these efforts. The LEA is attempting to move from demand-led provision for individual pupils, to a position in which the educational needs of all pupils are met through a designed continuum of interventions. This is a profound change, requiring a considerable change of heart both from some parents and in some schools, as well as the mediation of potential conflicts and, perhaps, confronting some vested interests. Elected members have been slow to give leadership in the past, but the cabinet member for education, supported by her colleagues, is fully involved in strategy formulation, and providing clear political backing.

111. There are clear signs of progress. The strategy set out in the revised EDP, for example, is much clearer than any previous document. The principles underlying inclusion are set out in several documents, are well understood by the schools, and closely linked to the council's developing emphasis on social inclusion and thereby to

its central priorities. There is a sharp realisation of the implications for mainstream provision of the inclusion of pupils presenting complex difficulties, and a training programme which reflects this.

112. There is, then, a sense of emerging coherence, but there is no one document which moves from an audit of needs and current provision to a clear definition of what aspects of the provision need to change in order the better to meet those needs, stating clearly the desired outcomes, the chosen mechanisms and their sequencing, and the resource implications.

113. The LEA is currently consulting on a formula for identifying the element in mainstream school budgets allocated to SEN. The formula is clear, and its introduction provides a worthwhile basis for rational discussion, and for effective monitoring and challenge. These are clear gains, but they do not address the critical question of what resources need to be redistributed and from what sources (and when); and associated with what other forms of support, if mainstream schools are to be enabled to deal effectively with a broadening range of needs. Progress has, therefore, been unsatisfactory.

114. The LEA has, therefore, moved a considerable distance in respect of SEN strategy, and since the appointment of the strategic leader for inclusion, progress has been quite rapid, and activity intense. However, there remains much to be done. Critically, the vision has not been effectively communicated to the schools; they remain unclear and unconvinced about the detailed implications, not least for resources, and not wholly persuaded that an LEA, not previously remarkable for flexibility in this area, had fully undergone the attitudinal change needed. Senior officers were trusted and admired; those feelings did not extend to others.

Statutory obligations

115. The LEA was criticised in the earlier OFSTED report for the relatively low proportion (41 per cent) of statements of SEN completed within the recommended 18 week period and for not having clear criteria for statutory assessment. The latter are now in place, detailed guidance having been issued. The other recommendations of the district auditor have also been addressed. The proportion of statements issued on time is now 57 per cent which is still too low. The quality of the statements is, however, good and appropriate attempts are made to make provision which reflects the wishes of parents. Statements are extensively documented, and appropriately reviewed. Overall, progress in this area has been satisfactory, and the LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities.

School improvement and value for money

116. A number of services, notably, the learning support service (LSS) for primary schools; the services for children with sensory impairment; and the education psychology (EP) service are highly regarded by schools. The behaviour support service (BSS) is also very highly regarded in primary schools, but not in secondary schools, in part, because it is small and has been understrength. As elsewhere, schools are most critical of the support provided for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). Training for SEN co-ordinators in mainstream schools

has increased in volume and sharpened its focus, in line with the increasing intensification of the move towards greater inclusion. The materials supplied suggest that it has been well conceived and helpful.

117. The LEA has, however, no secure basis for assessing the value for money provided either by centrally managed services, or by delegated funding within schools. It is unable to identify outcomes for the SEN provision it makes, and it is rightly concerned about the cost of the extra-district provision it makes. The cost of that provision rose from £1.3million to £1.8million between 1998/9 and 1999/00. The SEN budget is not under adequate control: it was, for example, overspent in three of the last four years. The LEA has targets for reducing the number of statements, but in fact it has risen since the previous inspection, as have the number of referrals and the number of pupils educated in special schools. In view of this, the value achieved for the £19.5million spent on SEN is less than satisfactory.

118. Nevertheless, the value for money provided by services is currently being more rigorously assessed than ever before. Crucially, the previous dogmatic insistence on service provision has been replaced by a determination to apply Best Value principles objectively, and in the interests of pupils and parents. The possibility of further delegation is being explored, as is the purchase of services through a regionally organised brokerage arrangement.

Recommendations:

- increase the proportion of statements issued within the 18 week guideline to an acceptable level;
- formulate an special educational needs development plan, projected over three to five years, that should set out the principles for inclusion, the purposes intended, an audit of needs and of current provision, and a statement of the changes in current provision required to meet the identified needs as flexibly as possible, together with a clear specification of the shifts in resources that will successively be required to move the LEA from the pattern of provision it currently has to that which, in view of the needs identified and the principles stated, it desires; and
- agreement on the draft formula for devising the SEN notional budget of each school should be quickly reached so that it can be included in next year's budget notification material and comply with requirements.

SECTION 6: ACCESS

The supply of school places

119. The previous inspection report recommended that in order to ensure that the management of school places is effective within the LEA, action for review should be linked to more specific benchmarks, timescales, reporting mechanisms and assigned responsibilities.

120. The LEA has made good progress with the recommendation and, in particular, has tackled secondary surplus places in a robust, well co-ordinated way. The school organisation committee reviews well the net cost of surplus places within their remit. The school organisation plan (SOP) contains the appropriate demographic information relevant to the supply of school places, policies, principles and associated plans relevant to the provision of school places within Rotherham LEA. It also includes appropriate activities to develop information on capacity, analysis and on actions required. Benchmarking and timescales are now included within the SOP. The authority has clear projections relating to the number of pupils. Plans are reasonable, an effective range of strategies are adopted to remove surplus places including a PFI scheme.

121. The planning of school places is viewed favourably by schools. This is one of two responses in the recent school survey rated in the top 25 per cent of LEA responses. There is evidence that the LEA is applying the benchmarks relating to surplus capacity in a proactive way.

Admissions to schools

122. The previous inspection report recommended that in order to assist the exercise of informed parental choice with the least disruption to the provision of efficient and effective education:

- the management of timescale and mechanisms for the notification of waiting lists for admissions should be reviewed; and
- the use of a second preference for a school place should be reconsidered.

123. There has been sound progress and both of these issues have been satisfactorily addressed through the admissions forum. By the end of May at least 97-98 per cent of all places were allocated. However, ten pupils had not been placed by the end of July and this is unsatisfactory. The authority has implemented multiple preferences (up to three from September 2002). Information to parents has been amended accordingly.

Asset management

124. The last inspection reported on improvements from the very poor state of affairs reported in an inspection of building issues by OFSTED and the Audit Commission in 1998. However, further improvements were recommended in 2000.

These were:

- improvement costs should be summarised in the asset management plan (AMP) and incorporated into the council's capital strategy;
- energetic efforts were needed to explore external funding;
- schools should be actively involved as partners in implementing the capital strategy; and
- regular co-ordinated, comprehensive and clear summaries of actions and intentions should be issued to schools.

125. These have been fully addressed and progress against the recommendations is good. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the underlying strategy is very good, with key strands knitting well together so that Rotherham is now making a significant impact on the physical learning environment of its pupils. This is taking time given the enormity of the task, but headteachers have renewed faith in new arrangements as the strategy unfolds. All but two schools have subscribed to a pooling arrangement to carry out a rolling programme of boiler and electrical repairs and replacements.

126. There is now comprehensive condition and suitability data, funding streams have been identified over five years to meet the £60 million back-log, members are supporting a £47 million PFI project, and property services, education and school personnel have formed good working partnerships to move the work on. Operationally, the building managers' monthly meetings with headteachers is a key feature, and ensures that the focus is on helping schools to tie asset management into their school development plans. All priority 1 and 2 work is on track for completion by 2003, and schools are provided with excellent information on priorities, timing, responsibilities and funding streams for this work.

Support for behaviour

127. The last inspection reported some strengths in the provision within the LEA, not least the work of the schools. Behaviour was good in primary schools and most secondary schools. Exclusions were few and diminishing. A joint primary inclusion project with Barnardo's was a significant, and valuable innovation; guidance on exclusion procedures was also effective. The weaknesses, however, outweighed these strengths. They included a lack of overall strategic co-ordination and of an integrated pupil database. Policies and procedures for managing behaviour in schools were inconsistent, and not supported by written advice or guidance from the LEA. Finally, there was too great a time lag between exclusion and placement in alternative provision.

128. Progress on the recommendation is just satisfactory overall and is largely the product of the last six months. The lack of overall strategic co-ordination has been addressed. Strategic management of support for behaviour is the responsibility of the strategic leader for inclusion, supported by a behaviour manager and integration manager. They have had some success in altering the configuration of support, so that it is more coherent and comprehensive. In this, they have been assisted by Excellence in Cities. Learning mentors and learning support units now provide an opportunity for early intervention in support of pupils in danger of permanent

exclusion. Guidance on behaviour policies and procedures has been issued to all schools, accompanied by helpful checklists designed to assist schools to evaluate their own practice. All schools have the necessary policy in place, for example, anti-bullying policies.

129. Existing behaviour provision is being clarified as part of the overall LEA drive for increased inclusion. For example, support for emotional and behavioural difficulties in both phases is inconveniently located for many pupils and schools, and there is some misunderstanding of the role of the learning support units. There is also too little PRU provision, though this has been partly offset by the setting up of satellite units, technically providing home tuition (though in youth centres) for pupils awaiting placement. This has reduced the time elapsing between exclusion and alternative placement, but have resulted in the establishment of unregistered units which are not subject to inspection. As such, it is an expedient, not a permanent solution. Nevertheless, the potential for a continuum of support aligned to needs exists. It is well supported by a good behaviour support plan, which sets out valuable principles and guidance; audits the current provision clearly; and proposes various much needed clarifications. There are, moreover, some aspects of support, such as that provided for primary schools by the behaviour support team, which are highly valued by schools.

130. There is still no integrated pupil database. Key information about potentially vulnerable pupils is still held in a number of databases, not all of which are compatible with each other. The effective transfer of information is key to real progress and to the effective targeting of resources, and by now, more should have been done. Only for children in public care has there been a significant advance.

131. Headteachers are committed to the principle of inclusion. Across the borough permanent exclusion is rare. There were, however, 177 pupils who moved school, without also moving house. Several headteachers quoted instances of the LEA failing to support this process adequately. Support, when requested, all too often did not follow the child.

132. The LEA has not established its credibility with schools, either in this area or in SEN. Responses to the school survey remain unfavourable, and headteachers though warmly positive about the strategic intentions of the authority, are insistent that the necessary change of culture has not occurred at levels below senior management. There remained, among the officers of the LEA who dealt with resource allocation at the day-to-day level, a degree of concern to assure compliance that prevented flexible or innovative responses to problems. It has to be stressed that this was their perception. It is, however, a significant problem that the LEA has to overcome if it is to establish the partnership it is, undoubtedly, genuinely seeking.

Recommendations:

- implement the recommendation of the earlier OFSTED report without further delay, by drawing its various databases about pupils together into one;
- provide training in customer relations and in the implications of inclusion for all officers who deal with schools on special educational needs and behavioural issues on a day to day basis; and
- take immediate steps to ensure that tuition units generated by the LEA are registered as pupil referral units, as required by the Education Act 1996.

Support for attendance

133. The last inspection recommended that the education welfare service (EWS), with the help of schools, should:

- challenge poor attendance, particularly in Years 10 and 11;
- establish a database of younger pupils and pupils at risk; and
- provide more advice to schools on promoting good attendance.

134. Progress is satisfactory. The EWS has worked with a group of schools and governors to develop the document 'school attendance matters'. This outlines strategies to improve attendance, and provides model policies, strategies for improving attendance, criteria for approving absence, issues related to punctuality and removal from role. The document has been approved by the SEN development group and the cabinet. In addition, schools have also been provided with a service level agreement to clarify the allocation of support.

135. There is currently no common database holding attendance data and progress on this aspect of the recommendation is unsatisfactory. However, education welfare officers collect, on paper, data at individual pupil level and data is shared regarding vulnerable pupils. The service is currently without a manager and this has impacted on the clarity of direction. However, a new head of service has recently been appointed.

Children in public care

136. At the time of the previous inspection, liaison between the education and social service department for the education of children in public care (CiPC) had only recently been established. An education liaison officer had been appointed to oversee the education provision for CiPC to maximise their attainment. The last inspection report recommended that the LEA provide an adequate education for all children in public care. There has been good progress on this recommendation and the educational support for children in public care is now good. The council and the departments are taking the issue seriously; there has been a clear change in attitude and approach to corporate parenting. Headteachers felt that the service had improved and that these children are being afforded a high priority.

137. A database has been set up (January 2001) to track pupils in public care. Each pupil has a personal education plan and there is a nominated governor and teacher in each school. A 'get real' team has been established to support pupils

experiencing difficulties. A number of initiatives are under-way to raise the self-esteem and attainment for these pupils, although with the exception of the proportion gaining a GCSE grade, attainment has not yet improved.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

138. Support for gifted and talented pupils is one strand within Excellence in Cities. As such, it constitutes an important element within the LEA's overall inclusion strategy, and is playing a key role in raising aspirations, and in tailoring the curriculum better to the needs of all pupils, not simply the designated cohort.

139. The work is very carefully managed. Precise quantifiable standards and targets have been set; monitoring is detailed, as are the reports arising from the monitoring. The LEA co-ordinator has succeeded in enlisting the enthusiasm of the schools, and the four secondary networks have quickly helped to instil collaborative working between schools. Links have been established with Sheffield, other LEAs and with higher education. Rotherham has been approached to participate in national training. All the participating schools have fully ratified policies, and have explored the implications for the curriculum for all pupils.

140. The precise success of this strand in raising attainment cannot at this stage be quantified. However, there has been some impressive activity. For example, the partnership, in co-operation with Sheffield LEA and Sheffield Hallam University mounted the 'get ahead' project, which enabled sixth-formers to work alongside undergraduates on a variety of community-based activities. Evaluations of their work have been assessed and accredited by the university. Other activities, including artists and poets in residence, the design of a web site, drama and music workshops and study skills seminars have enriched the curriculum for the pupils concerned, and more generally expanded views of what was accessible to Rotherham pupils.

Support for social inclusion

141. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA had no coherent strategy for social inclusion. It was committed to service provision, but with no clear vision of the outcomes which the services were intended to promote. To a large extent, this was true of the council as a whole. Since then, attitudes have shifted considerably, and the council is striving to become more focused on the intended benefits of provision for the people of Rotherham. No agreed corporate statement of policy on social inclusion yet exists, but one is being formulated by the social inclusion unit within the council, and it is clear that education looms large in the council's priorities to promote full participation in social, economic and cultural life.

142. Schools surveyed were still critical of most of the LEA's provision for social inclusion. Nevertheless, much has improved, and most of the improvement has occurred since the survey was completed. For example, many of the elements of a strategy for the inclusion of special educational needs pupils are in place; some aspects of support for behaviour and attendance are clearer; and provision for children in public care has undoubtedly improved. The strategy for improving the attainment of minority ethnic pupils is clearer in the Education Development Plan than in the earlier Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement Grant plan, and the council

is now, rather belatedly, taking seriously the recommendations of the report on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Overall, this is an improving picture, and on balance a satisfactory one. What makes it so is, above all, the commitment of Rotherham headteachers to providing for pupils in their own community, and the impetus given to inclusion by Excellence in Cities.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

The LEA should ensure that all 19 recommendations from the last inspection are fully addressed and continue to implement its good EDP. It should, as a matter of urgency, address the following corporate issue:

In order to ensure that the work of all the groups of services within the directorate contribute to achieving the council's corporate aims, improve the quality of strategic management by:

- completing and implementing the corporate plan;
- ensuring that strategic, operational, service and programme area plans are coherent and are targeted clearly on meeting the LEA's aims;
- completing and implementing a performance management system; and
- improving the management of information across the borough;

There are a few recommendations where the LEA is not making satisfactory progress and these should also be tackled as a priority, namely aspects of ICT strategy, management of information and a lack of clarity concerning school budgets.

In order that schools can make valid comparisons when purchasing services:

- services should be traded at full cost, and a staged approach to separating delegated amounts from costs should be agreed with schools;
- the council should urgently address the shortcomings highlighted by agencies such as district audit in order to embed consistently Best Value policy and practice into all aspects of its operation;
- provide sufficient information and advice about Best Value in order for schools to comply with their requirement to report how they will apply its principles to their practice;
- the intention to build next year's budget around the corporate and Best Value Performance Plan should be taken forward with urgency;
- accounting procedures should be modified to reflect current structures and requirements;
- school budget notification material and Part 4 of the Section 52 return should mirror each other and enable the reader to check budget formulation and accuracy;
- improve schools' ability to analyse their own spending patterns by providing or recommending appropriate benchmarking materials; and
- the LEA and the broker should jointly provide schools with unequivocal notification of the arrangement for procuring management services from the authority.

In order to facilitate the rapid and effective transfer of information about pupils with problems, and in doing so enable services in support to them to be more effectively co-ordinated, the LEA should:

- establish a coherent ICT system for the recording of data about individual pupils and improve arrangements for the electronic transfer of data both within the LEA and between LEA and schools.

In order to improve provision for pupils educated other than at school the LEA should:

- take immediate steps to ensure that tuition units generated by the LEA were registered as pupil referral units, as required by the Education Act 1996.

The LEA will also need to draw up plans to address the following recommendations:

In order to improve strategic management:

- define clearly the role of the scrutiny committee, and increase the rigour for scrutiny of policies and independent questioning of cabinet decisions.

In order to further improve the partnership between the LEA and schools:

- revise the procedures for consultation with primary schools and ensure that there is effective feedback on decisions taken.

In order to improve planning and support for school improvement:

- improve the coherence of major education plans such as the Education Development Plan, education strategic plan, action plan and the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan;
- the draft LEA literacy strategy needs to be agreed as a matter of urgency;
- the impact of the management and delivery of support for literacy across the key stages needs to be systematically monitored and evaluated; and
- devise and implement a strategy for the induction of new headteachers.

In order to move the target setting process forward the LEA needs to:

- speed up the process of collecting individual pupil level data; and
- draw up a systematic and ongoing development programme for all advisers that is linked closely to their core responsibilities of monitoring and challenging schools.

In order to improve support for pupils with special educational needs:

- increase the proportion of statements issued within the 18 week guideline to an acceptable level.

In order to guide the implementation of its inclusion policy more securely, the LEA should in continued consultation with schools, parents and other stakeholders:

- formulate an special educational needs development plan, projected over three to five years, that should set out the principles for inclusion, the purposes intended, an audit of needs and of current provision, and a statement of the changes in current provision required to meet the identified needs as flexibly as possible, together with a clear specification of the shifts in resources that will successively be required to move the LEA from the pattern of provision it currently has to that which, in view of the needs identified and the principles stated, it desires; and
- improve and accelerate the co-ordination of, and actively promote, strategies to combat racism.

In order to establish more securely with headteachers that its intention to support schools more flexibly is genuine, the LEA should:

- provide training in customer relations and in the implications of inclusion for all officers who deal with schools on special educational needs and behavioural issues on a day-to-day basis.

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