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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
ROTHERHAM
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 87 schools. The response rate was 90 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery, 10 primary, seven secondary and two special schools, and one pupil referral unit (PRU). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

4. An inspection of the LEA's maintenance of school buildings was carried out by the Audit Commission and OFSTED. A report on that inspection was issued in December 1998. It concluded that the acutely poor conditions in some of the LEA's schools were largely due to:-

- (i) a failure to follow best practice in the planning and management of building maintenance; and
- (ii) inadequate resourcing of the structural maintenance of schools in recent years.

The progress made in implementing the recommendations from that earlier inspection is commented on in this report.

COMMENTARY

5. Rotherham LEA serves an area of some disadvantage, which has undergone sharp decline over recent decades in a range of traditional industries. Rates of unemployment are above average and much employment is relatively ill-paid. The population is largely white, and educational expectations continue to reflect a tradition of unskilled or semi-skilled work.

6. Within that context the schools, in many respects, work well. OFSTED evidence shows that they are on the whole soundly managed, orderly and offering a broadly satisfactory quality of education. They are generally popular with parents, to the extent that the LEA is a large net importer of pupils. Attendance is satisfactory, and the rate of exclusion well below national averages. Standards are in line with similar LEAs at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. However, compared with England as a whole, standards are low at each key stage, significantly so at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. Nevertheless, in 1999 they improved at above national rates at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 with, for example, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more higher grade GCSE passes rising by 3.6 points. That is a considerable achievement which needs to be consolidated and extended.

7. Rotherham's claims, however, to give strong emphasis to raising educational standards have not been supported by its expenditure patterns over recent years. The schools are poorly funded, especially at secondary level. The LEA's standard spending assessment is low, and that position has been further exacerbated by the Council's past parsimonious treatment of education. Rotherham spends less per secondary pupil than any other metropolitan authority and less than most per primary pupil.

8. In 1999 OFSTED published a report of an inspection (requested of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools by the Secretary of State, and largely carried out by the Audit Commission) on the maintenance of school buildings in Rotherham. That report revealed many defects, both in the building stock and in the LEA's management of it. The operational issues related to buildings are now being addressed, but the impression of strategic drift, inadequate use of available information, and poor planning holds true, as this inspection shows, for other aspects of the LEA's work, notably those identified in paragraph 10 below.

9. The LEA exercises many of its functions adequately, and achieves success in the following:

- support for schools causing concern;
- the work of officers and advisers in promoting school improvement;
- the use of the national literacy and numeracy strategies in primary schools;
- support for school management and governance;
- early years provision;
- the work of individual SEN and pupil welfare services;
- personnel support;
- co-operation and consultation with other services;
- support for attendance; and
- the organisation of school admissions.

These are important strengths, and it should further be acknowledged that in all areas of the LEA's work, some competent provision is to be found.

10. Functions which are not exercised adequately include:

- strategic planning and leadership;
- the allocation of resources to priorities;
- the timely involvement of stakeholders in financial decision making;
- challenging some schools in some aspects of their performance;
- the provision of a coherent Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strategy;
- the strategic oversight of Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- the provision of sufficiently rigorous education for all looked after children;
- the specification of services;
- the funding of schools; and
- the funding of the maintenance of premises.

11. In many of the areas in which the authority has strengths they do not have their full impact because of a lack of vision, leadership, effective management and adequate funding. A recent restructuring has led to an increased emphasis on the need to raise educational standards, but the Council nevertheless has no corporate plan.

12. The Education Department, which is thinly staffed, is clearly struggling to come to terms with these problems and the demands of the national agenda. It has little capacity to make effective use of management information to target resources, little planning capacity, and few effective strategies for performance management. Consultation with schools about funding is of limited effectiveness and financial arrangements more than usually opaque.

13. Rotherham schools have much to cope with: relatively poor resourcing, often inadequate buildings, and an LEA whose performance is much less than satisfactory in the range of functions identified in paragraph 10 of this report. An LEA is required to discharge its functions with a view to promoting high standards in schools. Rotherham undoubtedly intends to do so, but in view of the shortcomings listed above, we do not believe that it is in fact assisting its schools sufficiently to raise standards.

14. Like all other LEAs, Rotherham faces many challenges, in addition to the need to act on the recommendations that arise out of the many criticisms made in this report. The majority of its unsatisfactorily performed functions are not beyond repair, but the task of reconstruction is a heavy one. We doubt that the LEA currently has the range of management expertise needed to undertake it successfully. Also, we believe that it will be necessary for OFSTED and the Audit Commission to examine the LEA's progress within the next two years.

SECTION ONE

THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. Rotherham's traditional industries have declined sharply, increasing unemployment. Earnings are low compared with national figures, and the area qualifies for financial assistance through European Union Objective 1 status.

16. The 43,500 children of school age include 4.4 per cent of ethnic minority heritage. Twenty four per cent of primary pupils and 18.1 per cent of secondary pupils take up free school meals compared with national figures for entitlement of 21.1 and 18.2 per cent respectively. There are 3.6 per cent of pupils with statements of special educational needs in primary schools and 3.4 per cent in secondary schools, compared with national figures of 3.4 and 3.9 per cent respectively. Three quarters of three-year-old children and virtually all four-year-old children participate in early years education.

Performance

17. The LEA maintains three nursery schools, 110 primary schools, 17 secondary schools, seven special schools and three pupil referral units. There is a large net inflow of pupils from nearby LEAs. The need for schools to raise standards is shown by:

- the attainment of pupils on entry to primary schools is lower than that nationally;
- in primary schools national test scores are significantly lower in Rotherham than in England and in similar LEAs in English and mathematics;
- results at Key Stage 3 are a little below national figures. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more higher grade GCSE passes has been much lower than the national figure;
- standards rose less quickly than standards nationally at all stages between 1996 and 1998. However, national test results for 1999 show, in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2, a rate of improvement above the national. At GCSE level, the LEA also improved at a faster rate than that achieved nationally and surpassed its targets for 2000;
- pupils from ethnic minorities achieve significantly lower than the school population as a whole at each key stage;
- the management of schools and the quality of education they provide are usually as good as, and often better than, national norms;
- attendance is average in primary and secondary schools;
- the rate of permanent exclusions is well below the national average; and
- currently one secondary school and eight primary schools have serious weaknesses, and one primary school is subject to special measures.

18. The quality of education provided by schools and their management are generally sound and sometimes good. However, although rising, standards of attainment are low and need to increase further.

Funding

19. The overall Council budget in 1999/2000 is £9.3m above its aggregated Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) of which almost £5m arises from additional capital financing costs. In contrast it has spent below its SSA on education by a total of over £12m since 1996/97. The Council argues different LEA accounting procedures explain its comparatively lower revenue spending on education.

(£000)	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	<i>Period Total</i>
Education SSA	102,425	101,926	109,940	116,136	430,427
Expenditure (Budget 1999/2000)	99,872	97,966	106,591	113,940	418,369
Shortfall against SSA	-2,553	-3,960	-3,349	-2,196	-12,058
Budget as % of SSA	97.5%	96.1%	97.0%	98.1%	97.2%

20. The education service revenue spending is planned to be around £4m (3.5 per cent) below the SSA in 1999/2000. The increase in SSA was £6.2m, of which £5.6m has been allocated to school budgets, central services and other education revenue activities. In order to make some progress in 1999/2000 on capital repairs and buildings replacement, the Council has chosen to spend an additional £1.7m. The major portion has come from revenue (£1.1m) with the balance being budgeted growth.

21. Significant features of Rotherham's education¹ budget highlight the low funding for secondary education in particular and the limited potential to increase it from within the existing education budget. These include:

- the SSA is £2274 per primary pupil and £2891 per secondary pupil. These are below the metropolitan averages. Spending per secondary pupil is the lowest of all metropolitan authorities. This reflects a low SSA and a local decision to spend below it in recent years;
- the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) share per pupil in the secondary sector is the fifth lowest of all metropolitan authorities. Funding delegated to primary schools, at £1554, is below the metropolitan average of £1583;
- balances and planned savings for primary and special schools are satisfactory. Thirteen out of the 17 secondary schools have reported a net end of year deficit. In 1998-99, the total debt for the sector was over £300,000 (0.9 per cent of the total secondary budget) for the second year running. The deficits are not individually large but the overall situation is unsatisfactory;
- in 1999/2000 Rotherham delegated 82.3 per cent of the LSB, compared with 81.8 per cent of the General Schools Budget in 1998/99. The additional

¹ In its original 1999/2000 Section 52 statement Rotherham sought to reserve significant funds *within* the Local Schools Budget (LSB), to match New Deal for Schools (NDS) allocations, support the funding of priorities identified by the Asset Management Plan (AMP) and to respond to in-year emergencies. This funding should be treated as capital expenditure. The budget calculations in this report anticipate the adjustment, which reduces the LSB, increases the percentage level of delegation and increases the gap between the revenue budget and SSA.

delegation to schools in 1999/2000 has been for structural buildings maintenance; and

- Rotherham has considerably less funding available than other similar authorities for further delegation and therefore the potential for growth of school budgets within existing resources is limited.

Council Structure

22. The Council has 66 elected members: 63 Labour, two Conservative and one Liberal Democrat. A modernised Council structure came into force in 1999 including a cabinet representing the major local authority functions and which meets separately as an Education Cabinet.

23. Rotherham's services have also been reorganised. A chief executive leads a team of five executive directors, one for each of the Council's programme areas. One of the executive directors - Education, Culture and Leisure Services – is supported by four Heads of Service, two of whom work directly within education, covering respectively: (1) curriculum services and educational standards; and (2) schools services. Two other services also provide some support for schools, as part of their functions.

24. Since the reorganisations the political leadership has affirmed education as its top priority. The roles of councillors and officers have been more clearly defined enabling both to carry out their respective tasks more efficiently. It is too early to gauge the full impact but the very lean senior staffing of the education service needs to be kept under review, especially its capacity for the strategic planning of education. It is also too early, as in other local authorities, to judge how effective is the process of scrutiny in the new political framework.

The Education Development Plan

25. The LEA's EDP 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. These conditions are being addressed.

26. The priorities for school improvement in the EDP are: (a) literacy; (b) numeracy; (c) support for schools causing concern; (d) management development; (e) use of ICT in teaching and learning; (f) promoting excellence for all children; and (g) raising standards through focused support. Priorities (a) to (e) are entirely feasible and certainly necessary. However, parts of priority (f) and (g) are not sufficiently defined or focused on major needs for improvement.

27. The EDP acknowledged the pressing need to raise standards and included sound analyses of school and LEA performance. Consultation has been extensive but support for the plan in schools is not clear: in the school visits few staff other than headteachers were aware of the plan. In the school survey secondary schools were

more critical than those in other LEAs about the clarity of the LEA's approach to school improvement and consultation over the EDP.

28. Necessarily challenging targets have been set for improvements at Key Stage 2. However, initially there were five per cent and two per cent shortfalls between the schools' aggregated literacy and numeracy targets and the LEA targets in the year 2000. The LEA has asked schools to review their targets for 2000 and has received a positive response, particularly in mathematics, where the schools' aggregated target now exceeds that of the LEA. Schools may also find the suggested target range they have just been sent will help them to set more realistic targets for 2001. The LEA has provided a good range of comparative data, training and some challenge to schools on how to set targets. Despite this, many primary schools are poor at doing so, judging by the outcomes of the test results compared with school targets for 1999. Sufficiently challenging targets have been set for secondary schools.

29. The plan is insufficiently detailed and targeted to guide coordinated action and to enable the LEA to check its progress. These deficiencies, together with those originally identified, need to be remedied. The literacy priority, for example, has five different activities, within which are many discrete programmes. All are worthwhile, but it is not clear how they link together or how they are targeted at schools with the most need. In constructing the plan, an opportunity has been missed to develop a coherent approach to tackle the problem of literacy in the borough. Similarly, there are weaknesses in the plan for ICT. It included seven different activities that appear disconnected and not clearly targeted to greatest need. It is not linked clearly to the plans for the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). The lack of detail in places will make it difficult to monitor and evaluate the plan.

30. The EDP has had little influence on the planning of schools. However, satisfactory progress is being made within most of the individual priorities. Literacy and numeracy are progressing well, although ICT is held back by lack of strategic thinking and a resultant piecemeal development. Schools causing concern have, to date, been given ample help to improve, with good effect. A good framework for managers to review their schools is in place and well targeted management development schemes are running, with that for secondary middle managers showing strong signs of success. Support for special educational needs and pupils' behaviour, however, show weaknesses in staffing and implementation as well as in the original planning. In addition, the EDP is not aligned closely enough with other major education plans, making the coherence of planning overall weak.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

31. Rotherham does not allocate resources to schools based on an objective analysis of their needs. Prioritising spending decisions and assessing opportunity costs need to be undertaken in the knowledge of the current shortfall of spending, particularly in the secondary sector. The Council intends to passport future increases in SSA. This will, of itself, not close the gap between education SSA and spending,

although during the inspection the Council leader expressed the intention to spend at SSA as soon as possible.

32. The approach to further delegation of funding to schools in Rotherham is unsatisfactory. It does not reflect a presumption in favour of school autonomy expected of local authorities and set out in the Code of Practice: LEA – School Relations. Schools have very limited flexibility and choice. The central services, which the Council is proposing to delegate from 2000/2001, are undoubtedly valued by many schools who would wish to retain them. They are only offered on a three year buy-back basis. There is limited information on costs, an inadequate time for consultation and restricted information on service content.

Recommendations

In order to increase the impact of education development planning (paragraphs 25-30):

- the activities in the EDP should be made more internally coherent, include better success criteria, and should be targeted more precisely at schools in need;
- schools should be assisted further to develop effective target setting procedures; and
- the EDP's priorities should, where appropriate, be linked to other borough and education service plans.

In order to ensure schools are resourced to discharge their responsibilities to support and increase the achievement of pupils (paragraphs 19-21):

- the level of funding available for schools should be reviewed in the light of a rigorous analysis of their needs and the Council's priorities.

In order to help schools exercise their autonomy, offer them greater flexibility and choice, and to ensure greater incentive to secure cost effectiveness of bought-back services (paragraphs 31-32):

- the pricing and service specifications for delegated management services should be reviewed and improved.

SECTION TWO

LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, Challenge, Support, Intervention

33. The advisory service, whose aims and procedures have recently been revised in consultation with headteachers and governors, devotes nearly nine tenths of its time to school improvement, a little under one tenth to LEA strategic management and small amounts – too small in the case of SEN – to access and SEN issues. The main functions, well in tune with government policy, are:- measuring school performance and helping schools to evaluate themselves; helping schools identify their development needs; supporting school improvement via curriculum, management and staff development; and keeping governing bodies and the LEA's senior officers and members informed about schools. The LEA makes good use of information from inspection reports in order to inform the EDP and INSET programme.

34. In 1999 Rotherham did not delegate any of the funding for its advisory service because of uncertainty over its EDP. It is now, however, currently consulting on the potential to do so for 2000. Expenditure per head on school improvement in Rotherham is £24 compared with the metropolitan district average of £20. There is potential in Rotherham for further delegation but it must ensure that it does not limit its potential to secure key curriculum support for its schools currently lacking for instance, in mathematics.

35. Schools are given a clear description of the advisers' roles. Systems for identifying schools' performance characteristics are sound and include: liaison adviser visits and joint target-setting procedures; the detailed scrutiny of school development plans, inspection reports and other data; and contact with schools through initiatives such as the literacy and numeracy strategies. The systems are appropriate for the primary and secondary sectors and this is reflected in the school survey. The situation is unsatisfactory for special schools.

36. Most of the recent advisory work has been centrally-directed core activity within the schools or contributing to school support either within individual institutions or via programmed training courses. Many of the latter benefit from the LEA's busy and well-equipped professional development centre. The allocation of time to schools is determined in line with EDP priorities. All schools receive one day per term for visits by liaison advisers. These visits are based on agenda, sent to schools in advance. Schools causing concern have additional time determined by the reactions of advisers to requests from schools or to advisers' interpretation of the scale of particular problems. This enables the service to respond flexibly to needs but some heads, especially in the secondary sector, are rightly concerned that advisory time is not always allocated objectively. The primary headteachers are well satisfied with the authority, depth and sufficiency of advisory support, but secondary and special school heads are concerned about its sufficiency.

37. The work of advisers is soundly managed except that monitoring of this work is not sufficiently rigorous even though a variety of methods is used. Other concerns need to be addressed including:- a high turnover in recent years of liaison advisers making it

difficult for them to establish strong working relationships with their assigned schools; and a lack of advisory support for the LEA's special schools with too little help in target-setting. These deficiencies are in part related to recent reorganisations of staff, in part to the lean central staffing of the LEA, but also in part due to a lack of quality control and of appropriate recording of the visits to schools.

38. The critical issues at this time, however, relate to how rigorously the advisory service challenges schools and how well it can support those in need. At primary level, schools are well supported by advisers who are alert, knowledgeable and well directed. In special schools there appears to be an absence of challenge and a dearth of support. At secondary level, what support there is is generally effective but there are gaps in provision.

Collection and Analysis of Data

39. The LEA provides schools with an effective service for the collection and analysis of data. Primary schools rated the service as good and secondary schools rated it as better than satisfactory.

40. Primary schools receive assessment results for Key Stages 1 and 2 in a useful variety of ways enabling them to compare themselves with schools locally and nationally. The LEA also makes good use of data to help schools predict future performance. The baseline assessment scheme is well constructed, with clear criteria and suggested ways for pupils to move on.

41. The unit analysis provided by the advisory service involves an analysis of pupils' responses in Year 2, 4 and 6 tests in order to identify weaknesses in performance and possible shortcomings in teaching and the curriculum. This is a very helpful analysis that could well be promoted in secondary schools. In the secondary phase, the LEA has funded the use of value-added indicators such as YELLIS, for GCSE, and ALIS for A level. Schools are provided with useful comparative data.

42. To help schools make sense of the data and to understand how to set targets, the LEA has provided training for teachers and governors, but no written guidelines. In addition, target setting has been the focus of liaison visits. Schools are given appropriate advice on how to set targets, although the support to schools from individual advisers, which is usually rigorous and consistent, sometimes varies in rigour and has not always helped schools to set realistic and challenging targets. In spite of the efforts of the schools and the LEA's support, some primary schools remain poor at setting challenging targets, judging by the outcomes of the 1999 National Curriculum tests compared with schools' targets for that year. Results of several primary schools were 20 per cent higher or lower than their target and a few varied by as much as 37 per cent.

Support for Literacy

43. Standards in literacy are low. Results at Key Stage 2 were much better in 1999 than before, but with only 64 per cent of pupils at level 4 and above, they are still below

the national average. The LEA is therefore right to rank improvement in literacy as a high priority if it is to achieve its EDP target of 80 per cent by 2002.

44. The LEA's activities to improve literacy, highly rated by primary headteachers, are centred on the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) which has been introduced successfully and is already helping to raise standards. The LEA has gone some way to meeting the criticisms recently made by the Basic Skills Agency about the lack of strategic management, through, for example, the establishment of a steering group for literacy. However, other literacy projects are not well coordinated or evaluated, and there is no overall coherent plan.

45. As part of the NLS, 17 of the schools most in need received intensive support last year and this has been, in most cases, very successful in raising standards. Consultancy was very effective and gave the teachers the opportunity to observe good practice, and receive useful advice on the literacy strategy. Whereas the overall increase in percentage of pupils gaining level 4 and above at Key Stage 2 was eight points, it was 17 points for the schools that received intensive support.

46. Secondary schools rated support for literacy as just about satisfactory in the school survey. Literacy activities are sometimes self-initiated, although the LEA does help in most cases. The two day training on the literacy strategy was well regarded by secondary heads of department. Schools are tackling the weaknesses in literacy of their Year 7 intakes in a number of interesting ways. However, given the wealth of data that the advisory service has about pupils, it should be possible to target support more directly to schools with the greatest need.

Support for Numeracy

47. Numeracy standards in primary schools have also been low although results improved considerably this year. The numbers of pupils reaching expected levels rose by four percentage points at Key Stage 1 and by 14 points at Key Stage 2. This brings the LEA's target of 74 per cent for 2002 within reach.

48. Support for numeracy is good for primary schools. Much progress has recently been made in improving the coverage of numeracy in the EDP and giving expert guidance to teachers. Schools were unanimous in their high praise for the Numeracy Strategy training they received. Visits to a small sample of schools receiving both intensive and 'light touch' support suggests that it is beginning to have the desired effect. There has been too little specialist support for secondary school mathematics teachers since 1997, given the absence of a subject adviser, even though the LEA has seconded a head of mathematics to support numeracy in secondary schools.

Support for Information and Communication Technology

49. Improving the use of ICT in teaching and learning is another component of the EDP. This is especially appropriate given that the LEA's analysis of inspection reports shows a significant number of primary and secondary schools having ICT-related key issues for action.

50. There has been a tradition of good support for primary schools, most of which have above the national average number of computers. Schools have access to a good range of centrally provided and tailor-made training opportunities. They have a good deal of appropriate help with their ICT development plans, many of which are well written. Support for secondary schools has been less coherent and consequently schools are tending to go their different ways. Despite this, co-ordinators spoke positively about the advice they received and the useful meetings organised for them. Primary and secondary teachers were unequivocal in their praise for the technical support available for ICT. Help is readily and speedily available; this service offers very good value for money.

51. Plans for NGfL funding are well underway. The allocation of funds and implementation of the rolling programme are fair and generally effective, although the reduction in funds last year caused schools to be awarded less than originally planned. The LEA intends to rectify this this year and accelerate progress with the installation of internal networks and internet connections.

52. The main weakness with ICT is the lack of a Council corporate strategy, which brings together the strands of curriculum, administration and NGfL. The approach to date has lacked vision and been piecemeal. Schools have to a certain extent been protected from this by their own resourcefulness and by the responsiveness and hard work of the ICT advisory team. The latter is over-stretched and without a clear steer to provide a more targeted service.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

53. Supporting schools causing concern is a further EDP priority. Only one primary school and no secondary or special schools are in special measures, and only seven per cent of primary schools, six per cent of secondary schools and no special schools have serious weaknesses. The LEA's intention – made explicit in the EDP – to reduce the number of schools causing concern to zero is attainable.

54. The EDP was rightly criticised for a lack of clarity in procedures for dealing with schools causing concern. Its policy has subsequently been redrafted and now contains a clear strategy for dealing with such schools. A useful set of indicators of performance focuses appropriately on standards, improvement, management, finance, popularity and attendance. The strategy overall is satisfactory as are the measures delineated to deal with the various categories of under performance. Due regard is paid to the critical work of the advisory service. The LEA has a satisfactory capacity to diagnose problems and give effective support to schools.

55. The LEA is well aware of the performance of its mainstream schools. It has a sound record in helping its weaker schools to improve, including helping schools to come swiftly out of special measures. The two primary schools which came out of special measures received extensive and authoritative help from liaison and senior advisers, together with well coordinated contributions from other LEA services. Progress has been inhibited by the high rate of turnover of liaison advisers. Much of the work of the advisory service has been effective, especially in the primary sector.

Support for School Management and Governance

56. Support for management is good overall, particularly in primary schools. The LEA has made this a high priority, and schools are generally satisfied with the level and quality of the support on offer. School inspection reports indicate that management in Rotherham schools is better than average.

57. Support for self-evaluation has had a positive impact on schools. The LEA has designed its own scheme for self-review which operates effectively. Schools are offered training to support the package. Schools will need further help to evaluate standards, progress and the quality of teaching, as there is not enough guidance on these in the package. Most schools make use of at least some aspects of the scheme and the majority of headteachers were very complimentary about it.

58. The EDP outlines eight proposed activities relating to management development. Headteachers have access to a variety of training options including Headlamp, the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers, and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers. There are also regular phase meetings for headteachers, at least one every half term, and training days for new primary headteachers.

59. The Excellence in Cities initiative has provided a useful vehicle for collaboration and discussion between secondary headteachers and the LEA.

60. There are insufficient opportunities for primary, secondary and special headteachers and senior managers to meet to discuss cross-phase issues.

61. Over 60 middle and senior managers have successfully completed the Management Charter Initiative (MCI) jointly funded by the Rotherham TEC and the LEA. MCI has now been replaced by a Diploma in Education Management, run by the LEA in conjunction with Sheffield Hallam University. All but three secondary schools have been involved. This training is highly regarded by the schools and they report that it has increased the management skills of participants, many of whom have since gained promotion.

62. Managers in most subjects attend well-regarded regular meetings at which management and curriculum issues are discussed. There is a lack of a specialist dimension to such meetings in mathematics, design and technology and modern foreign languages, however.

63. Support for school development planning (SDP) is good. The advisory service has given schools useful guidance on how to prepare their SDPs. Where this guidance is followed, the results are good; the SDPs include reviews, objectives, clear targets, costed activities and measurable success criteria. Most headteachers also welcome the advice and support on management issues given by their liaison adviser.

64. The LEA provides comprehensive and generally effective support for **governors**. Rotherham schools rated the information and advice given to governors more highly than in most of the LEAs surveyed. Governors are kept well informed. They appreciate the wide range of training courses on offer, in which over half of them

have taken part. Training that is focused on the needs of a single governing body has been particularly beneficial.

65. An adviser or officer attends at least one termly meeting of the governing bodies to provide support and challenge to governors. Governors, headteachers and Diocesan representatives find their presence extremely useful in shedding light on government and LEA policies as well as providing guidance and, where necessary, impetus to change.

Support for Early Years

66. Support for early years is part of one of the EDP priorities and this is important given the depressed standards of attainment of pupils entering primary education. The LEA makes good provision for the early education of a very high proportion of its pre-school age children. Entitlement, however, varies between different parts of the town. The information provided to parents is good though arrangements to involve them in the early assessment process are not sufficiently well developed.

67. The LEA has developed a clear and convincing strategic approach to early years services through its Development Plan and Partnership. The early years provision was reviewed recently by the District Audit. The LEA has responded positively to the recommendations. The revised Action Programme is good, outlining clearly minimum standards to promote assurance. The Partnership arrangements amongst social services, the LEA and Community regeneration, are effective and efficient. The Partnership has productive links with the private and voluntary sectors. Through joint meetings, training and seminars, it has succeeded in rationalising the LEA nursery provision, developing an early assessment format and establishing initiatives for children with developing needs.

Recommendations

In order to make more efficient the setting of performance targets for pupils (paragraphs 39-42):

- written guidelines should be prepared to help schools to use data in target setting; and
- liaison advisers should be trained to offer more consistent support and advice to schools in order to help them set challenging but realistic targets.

In order to raise standards in schools (paragraphs 43-52):

- LEA support programmes should be systematically evaluated to determine that they are effective and targeted best to meet needs;
- improved support for mathematics teaching in secondary schools should be secured;
- a corporate strategy should be drawn up for ICT which co-ordinates all the curricular and administrative strands in ICT, to provide a more consistent, cost effective and efficient service;

- support for ICT in the curriculum should be targeted to where the needs are greatest; and
- the EDP should be given a clearer ICT rationale, better defined tasks and success criteria against which it can be monitored and evaluated.

In order to improve further the existing good provision for early years (paragraph 66-67):

- the involvement of parents in early assessment should be improved.

SECTION THREE

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

68. The consequences of the previous policy of the Council include: restricted funding of schools; a long term failure to manage and resource the maintenance of the school building stock; and loss of the trust of secondary headteachers for, reportedly, its past reluctance to acknowledge and develop the contribution which education might make to regeneration. The streamlining of Council business and a strong determination to focus the work of members on raising educational standards and promoting social inclusion are intended partly to redress this situation. Success will depend on the extent to which reform is sustained and its impact evaluated over the next few years. It is being aided by the more focused conduct of Council business, and continued provision of clear and specific information by officers.

69. The borough has no corporate plan. The lack of one deprives officers of a guide to their work, Members of a rigorous framework for judging progress towards their aspirations, and the public of a clear statement of policy, for which it can hold the Council to account. Something is now being done to address this lack of strategy. In tandem with the political reorganisation, the local authority's services have been reformed to improve their focus and corporateness. A cross-departmental 'think tank' has just drafted a useful basis for the clearer allocation of resources to priorities entitled 'Planning to Succeed'. One of five key themes – Learning Opportunities for All Rotherham Citizens – has objectives for raising the educational achievement of the citizens of Rotherham which are entirely appropriate for local conditions and in tune with government priorities. They would be strengthened, however, if they dealt explicitly with the need to raise educational aspirations in the local population.

70. The strategic direction of the education service has not been consistently formulated and communicated to schools. The school survey, confirmed during the school visits, showed that primary schools were quite clear about the LEA's direction in matters of curriculum, teaching and school management. They were less clear about the borough's strategy for education. In secondary and special schools, the communication by the LEA of its overall strategic intentions came in for heavy and justified criticism.

71. The quality and impact of planning within education lack consistency, despite the considerable efforts made by the small central team of officers in the production of a large number of plans. Services are required to prepare annual business plans. The two plans most relevant to education – (1) Curriculum Services and Educational Standards and (2) Schools Services – link context with Council objectives, current influences and constraints. However, they make insufficient reference to timescales, actions, outcomes and evaluation of success to be fully effective as plans.

72. The plans drawn up in response to directives by central government are generally better, although there are wide variations in quality. The EDP, for example, deals unevenly with different priorities. At another level, a smooth process of planning has been drawn up which connects the EDP with school self review and the LEA's

review of school and service performance. Whilst it has not happened yet, there is potential within this process for future versions of the EDP to be synchronised with school development planning. There are few substantial links between the EDP and other Council and education plans. In contrast, the plan for early years development and childcare is a well conceived device to expand good quality provision for families through an integrated approach to early education and childcare. Even so, its connections with the EDP are tenuous.

73. The LEA has a lean administrative centre and its difficulties in meeting the many recent requirements to produce specific plans must be acknowledged. However, the presence within the education service of good and poor plans indicates a level of inconsistency and weakness in quality control which need to be dealt with. The LEA's capability in strategic planning needs to be improved considerably.

74. The LEA has forged effective arrangements for cooperation and consultation with other services. Recent consultations by councillors and visits to schools are regarded by headteachers and some parents as genuine efforts to gather views from schools. Communication between schools and the LEA is effective in some ways, for example through advisers, cluster groups and regular meetings with senior officers. Primary headteachers are very satisfied with this but secondary and special headteachers are more ambivalent. The teachers' unions, whilst dissatisfied with their involvement in the LEA's strategic planning, reported fruitful discussions with the LEA about, for example, Excellence in Cities. Consultation arrangements with governors are sound. Working relationships with the two Dioceses are excellent. Liaison with the Health Authority and the Health Trust is productive and the LEA has benefitted from this, for example by the training of teachers. Liaison with the police has been similarly productive in a number of ways for example in drugs education. Liaison with Social Services has been difficult but in recent months it has improved with the setting up of Joint Review Panels. In the past cooperation with the Race Equality Council led to various and useful joint activities.

75. Schools receive their budgets in a timely fashion in advance of the financial year. The Council's deliberations on budget matters take place over an extended period. The involvement of headteachers and governors is typically at a late point when options for spending are limited. Secondary heads have in the past regularly submitted recommendations about the funding of secondary schools but they believe that this has had little effect. There has been better communication this year between the Council members and representative headteachers.

Management Services

76. The education department provides accountancy, financial and ICT services. Personnel and payroll support is secured jointly through the Schools Services Division and central departments.

77. Financial support for schools from staff within the education department is well regarded by schools. Schools visited felt supported by staff who were readily accessible and responded promptly and helpfully to their queries. School budget shares are issued in advance of the financial year and the department seeks to assist schools by producing an outline budget plan which takes account in particular of

staffing costs. Most schools visited, however, were unable to identify readily the basis upon which their budgets had been calculated. The Section 52 statement does not include entries for notional SEN allocations. The consequence is that few primary and secondary schools are able to identify the resources for SEN, link them to the school's strategy or enable governors to report effectively to parents. Mechanisms for ensuring that schools have properly agreed licensed deficits are in place and are appropriate although end of year reconciliation is too lengthy. The LEA does not give schools financial benchmarking information to assist them in their decisions about the deployment of resources, although it responds well to requests for information.

78. Personnel support is good and is highly regarded by schools.

79. An ICT strategy for the support of the management of the education service and schools is only at a formative stage and in its absence there is duplication of key information. There is no link with NGfL strategy, which has been implemented independently; nor is there yet a coherent Council approach. Rotherham has yet to put in place a system for the electronic exchange of data with and between schools. Some updating of hardware is taking place. A new centrally linked ledger system is being installed. However, the timescale for replacing the existing system in advance of January 2000 is tight, although most schools visited had been able to have one member of staff trained on the new system by the week prior to the inspection. Support for administrative ICT is delivered in-house; schools generally view it as satisfactory.

80. The Buildings Works section has needed to work hard to recover from a poor reputation associated with high costs, poorly maintained school buildings and slow response times. It has made some good progress, although not all schools visited are yet convinced. In order to respond to schools' needs and their greater spending freedom, Building Works has produced improved documentation for its customers. It has undertaken its own survey of schools in order to inform its work practices and has recently established a user group.

81. Schools, who are now free to seek alternative providers, have been assisted with schedules of approved contractors issued by the Buildings Manager. Some schools visited were still under the incorrect impression that they were tied to an electrical contract with Buildings Works. Schools had the opportunity from April 1999 to join a five-year contract for grounds maintenance, provided by a private contractor. Most schools chose to accept the contract but a number, including a large proportion of secondary schools, have made their own arrangements or made partial use of the contract.

Recommendations

In order to promote collaboration to improve schools, councillors and senior officers should (paragraphs 68-70, 74):

- clarify the strategic direction of the education service; and
- develop further a climate of cooperation amongst all stakeholders to improve provision and standards in the borough.

In order to streamline and improve the effectiveness of planning (paragraphs 71-75):

- a corporate plan that sets education in the context of the Council's efforts to stimulate regeneration should be drawn up, published and used as a basis for service planning and evaluation; and
- external advice should be sought by the education service to improve and streamline its strategic planning capability.

In order to meet statutory requirements and to assist schools in the deployment of their budgets and the accountability of governors (paragraph 77):

- the local authority's Section 52 statement and schools' budget statements should record the notional special needs budget for each school.

In order to enable schools better to understand the school budget share allocations and to make more informed decisions about the deployment of their budgets (paragraph 77):

- the notification of school budget shares should enable schools more readily to assess the basis for their allocation; and
- schools should be assisted by benchmarking information about resource and staffing deployment.

In order to ensure the most effective use of data, reduce unnecessary duplication and communication inefficiencies, and to secure best value for time and money (paragraph 79):

- early and co-ordinated action should be taken to establish a coherent and integrated ICT strategy which takes full account of schools' needs; and
- a coherent ICT system should be introduced for the recording of data about individual pupils in order to help schools and the LEA monitor pupils' progress more easily, and to be able to transfer data to and from the LEA more efficiently.

SECTION FOUR

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

82. Provision for some aspects of SEN is satisfactory and special schools have been shown by inspections to be generally good. However, the LEA's strategy is weak overall. Its policy, outlined in the EDP, to increase inclusion and promote links between special and mainstream schools, lacks a clear indication of what is to happen, when and how. The SEN Strategy Group, in consultation with others, has recently identified six areas for development, but planning has only just begun. Progress has been made to implement a number of the recommendations of a recent District Audit report. Some key recommendations have not yet been addressed. This inspection has shown that such progress as has been made is not yet sufficiently embedded in the work of the LEA and the schools. In particular, the LEA has not clearly defined a unified SEN budget which includes identifying the general budget share in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN. Nor has it developed a framework for schools to guide their resourcing decisions and to enable these to be monitored and evaluated. It does not review school policy statements and assist in the development of good practice. The senior SEN adviser, the principal educational psychologist, and head of SEN support services are the main decision makers. Each has a specific role to play and, given the absence of a senior officer with strategic responsibility for SEN, there are conflicts of interest.

83. The LEA takes reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory duties. Advice to schools on the Code of Practice and information to parents are sound. Assessment and review procedures are well established with representation from the LEA. The proportion of statements completed within 18 weeks was 55 per cent in 1998/99. This represents an improvement on 1997/98 when it was 41 per cent. However, it remains too low. The percentage of psychological advice written within the recommended time scale is above average. The information contained in statements of SEN is satisfactory. However, the criteria used to decide whether statutory assessment is required are not sufficiently well established to make reliable judgements about which pupils require a statement.

84. Overall Rotherham's current budget for SEN is in line with the average of other metropolitan authorities, but it is increasing too rapidly. The number of new statements has increased from 164 in 1997/98 to 192 in 1998/99. At the same time, the number of discontinued statements in 1998/9 was 27. This is reflected in the budget for statements which has been underestimated in the last three years and consistently overspent. Each time it has been raised the following year. The budget in 1999/2000 for pupils with statements in mainstream schools and associated units is 89.6 per cent above the equivalent budget for 1996-97. This clearly reduces the ability of the education budget to meet other demands.

85. The LEA is seeking to reduce the number of pupils requiring a statement. This is being achieved, in part, via the Reading Recovery Scheme and the Learning Support Initiative which have resulted in positive gains for pupils. A training programme has been implemented for teachers and learning support assistants in mainstream schools allowing schools, to deploy learning support assistants to help children who may, in the past, have required a statement. The model enables schools to respond flexibly to the

needs of pupils. This system is well supported in schools by the Special Education Needs Support Service (SENSS). Although time allocated for this work is limited it has, nonetheless, put pressure on SENSS and has reduced work elsewhere.

86. It is too soon to say with confidence whether this strategy is working. An evaluation in one pyramid of schools indicated a reduction in the number of pupils referred for statutory assessment. That is a hopeful sign, but if the measures taken are to have their full effect, the planning needs to be better. The LEA has set itself no clear success criteria for reducing either the number of statements or the expenditure required to implement them. Lacking specific success criteria, it is in no position to identify what works, or at what cost.

87. The overall management of the SENSS is good. Teachers in the service have specialist expertise and qualifications and there is a clear shared approach in its work with schools. The delegation of budget management to the service has enabled it to respond more flexibly to the needs of schools through staff training and additional services. Headteachers and teachers were very positive about the work of the service, frequently describing it as excellent. The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is well managed and its development planning is good with clear targets. Monitoring of the work of the service is detailed. The service is well regarded and some headteachers would like more opportunities for psychologists to intervene with individual pupils.

88. Although individual SEN functions contribute effectively to aspects of the LEA's school improvement work, their contribution is not supported by strategic thinking, coordination and evaluation. Their impact is therefore unsatisfactory overall, although some of the specific work carried out gives sound value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision for SEN, steps should be taken to (paragraphs 82-88):

- develop and implement a strategic plan for SEN and communicate this clearly with LEA personnel, school staff and governors;
- clarify the criteria for the requirement for statutory assessment;
- implement all recommendations of the District Audit report and take steps to embed them in the work of the schools; and
- clarify SEN funding for mainstream schools.

SECTION FIVE

ACCESS

School Premises

89. The condition of school buildings is a matter for serious concern. Section 10 inspections have revealed that the condition of premises hinders the delivery of the curriculum in nearly one primary school in ten. Moreover, in nearly four out of ten secondary schools the inspections show that delivery is seriously impaired by the poor condition of the premises. Too many Rotherham schools are grim places, and the Council's neglect is well documented. In the majority of schools visited there were examples of poorly maintained and neglected buildings impacting on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The inevitable time lag in responding to the issues means that conditions will worsen in already critical settings. The position is exacerbated for schools because under the Fair Funding requirements, they have had since April 1999 responsibility for structural maintenance of a deteriorating building stock in return for a share of delegated resources, which were formerly inadequate. The increase in budget for buildings has initially been focused on capital repairs and replacement and held centrally by the Council.

90. In the school survey, Rotherham was rated as consistently performing significantly worse than other authorities in exercising its buildings responsibilities. The rating of the Council by its secondary schools was very low indeed.

91. Rotherham has responded energetically to the adverse OFSTED report of December 1998 at an operational level. An action plan based upon the report's recommendations has been prepared and is being implemented. Progress has been made in undertaking full structural and energy surveys for all school buildings. The approach is in line with DfEE requirements for the preparation of the authority's Asset Management Plan (AMP). All schools visited were aware of and reassured by the survey programme. They have yet to receive the results of the survey, however, and remain apprehensive of the forecast costs and their ability to meet their responsibilities.

92. There has been welcome progress, albeit belated, in tackling the buildings deficit. A significant number of schools in the borough have benefited from much needed remedial work and renovation. Although it must be recognised that the property issue is a complicated one, schools visited were not clear about the stage of development, nor were officers aware of what others had told schools. There is a need for more coordinated, clear and timely communications to all parties to demonstrate the nature of the progress being made.

93. The transfer of the responsibility for oversight of the condition of school buildings to Economic and Development Services has provided the potential for a clearer focus on condition needs. This re-structuring has involved the appointment of a Building Manager and a team of assistants who have responsibility for supporting a group of schools. Schools have welcomed the monthly meetings with their assistant buildings managers, who are well regarded by the schools, to communicate developments on the AMP, to update it and to assist in progress chasing. This group of staff is well placed to work with schools during the spring term to undertake the assessment of

buildings, sufficiency and suitability to complete the initial AMP. Rotherham expects to meet the DfEE timetable for the preparation of AMPs.

94. Whereas the support systems are in place and the Council will soon have a very clear picture of the building conditions, the money available to improve them is uncertain. In 1999/2000 the Council received £2.3m capital grant in the New Deal for Schools to finance electrical systems testing, rewiring, heating and roofing repairs. In order to finance its immediate structural capital replacement and repair needs, it capitalised £1.1m from its existing education revenue budget to be held centrally, allocated from corporate resources an additional £600,000 and added the £287,000 underspend from the 1998/99 budget. A further £270,000 has been employed from the energy management grant to finance boiler replacements. The Council proposed a combined painting and repair/painting programme. This would have involved schools contributing a degree of matched funds from their delegated budgets. However, because of the lack of overall support from schools, this has been abandoned for the current year.

95. Although there has been some discussion with consultants, regrettably no progress has been made in applying for Private Finance Initiative credits or in exploring in any depth the applicability of this scheme for Rotherham's long term building needs. However, officers are exploring an alternative public private partnership funding proposal linked to the bid under round four of New Deal for Schools. This will focus on much needed and major school replacement and refurbishment projects costed at £11m. Much faith is being placed in this strategy to contribute to the resolution of major complex and critical property difficulties. Some progress has been made, but nothing firm is yet in place and the timescales are tight.

96. The Council has costed what it describes as its remaining "most urgent" work at over £6.5m. More reliable figures will emerge from the AMP and the Council acknowledges that they are likely to be higher. The strategy for tackling this balance to rely upon the continuation of the allocation of £1.7m from the education revenue budget or seeking internal borrowing of a maintenance fund, at a potential cost to the education budget is inadequate.

The Supply of School Places

97. Rotherham's level of unfilled school places is below the average for England. Its School Organisation Plan summarises the strategy for the future management of places and areas where further action may be required. It is not sufficiently clear, however, in identifying responsibilities for monitoring, reporting and future action, or timescales involved. The decision, following public consultation, not to close one of three secondary schools in north west Rotherham was also linked to further monitoring activity but this is also not well defined.

98. The Key Stage 1 plan has been implemented. Currently 14 out of 85 schools have classes over 30, but the Council is on track to meet its statutory target. Consideration is being given to move from a three point to a two point of entry for admission to reception classes from September 2000. This will generate a further additional budget pressure for the Council.

Admissions to Schools

99. Forecasting of pupil numbers is sound. The mechanics of the admissions arrangements for community schools is managed centrally and works well. The 2000/2001 admissions handbook for parents for secondary transfer is very good. It is clearly set out and accords with the expectations of the Code of Practice. One unsatisfactory aspect, however, is the assisted late transfer of pupils from one school to another well into the autumn term. The local authority maintains a waiting list for popular schools, which it keeps open until 30 September. Because of slippage in establishing whether vacancies have developed at oversubscribed schools, students may be transferring from one secondary school to another at the instigation of the local authority as late as November. In accordance with guidance, Rotherham has established its Schools Admissions Forum, which covers the borough as the relevant area.

100. Rotherham has operated with fully independent appeals panels in place for two years. Recent court cases have delayed final decisions but the majority of appeals are completed by June. The number of appeals has increased 76 per cent over the past two years to 382 in 1998/99, when 248 were upheld (65 per cent). The Council has considered, but not implemented, the recommendation contained in the report from the District Auditor² for parents to be able to express more than one preference for a school place. It has indicated that this is something that might be reviewed by the Admissions Forum. The legal requirement to meet the class size requirement at Key Stage 1 introduces an added dimension to admission arrangements and emphasises again the particular importance of the expression of the single preference for a school place where there is no provision for a second preference.

101. Provision for pupils out of school is variable. Schools rate services for excluded pupils as unsatisfactory and provision for pupils out of school for reasons other than exclusion as satisfactory.

Promoting Social Inclusion

102. Provision for permanently excluded pupils includes alternative mainstream schools, three Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), other LEAs and the Youth Service. Mainly owing to inadequate coordination of various services and absence of an effective and reliable database for pupils at risk, there are considerable delays between exclusion and alternative provision. However, the LEA makes strenuous efforts to meet its statutory obligation in respect of pupils out of school. Two pupils excluded between February and June 1999 had no place at the time of inspection in November 1999, but have since been found places.

103. The LEA provides useful information for parents about their responsibilities if they choose to educate their children other than at school. Systematic arrangements ensure that such education is efficient and suitable. If parents fail repeatedly to meet the minimum standards or if they experience difficulties with the education of their children, the authority effectively reintegrates pupils into an LEA school.

² District Audit (1997) *Planning of School Places – Rotherham Metropolitan District Council 1997/97*

104. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) contributes effectively to enabling the LEA to meet its statutory responsibilities in respect of school attendance and associated legislation. The service provides satisfactory support to ensure that schools meet their responsibilities for child protection, youth justice and child employment. It carries out successfully visits to homes in cases of permanent exclusions and when parents choose to educate their children at home. The EWS does not have a development plan but evaluates effectiveness of its work by monitoring data on referrals, rates of attendance and from external agencies such as the Audit Commission.

105. Attendance in primary and secondary schools is in line with the national average but slightly better than that of similar LEAs. Unauthorised absence is average in primary and secondary schools. The EWS recognises that averages mask unsatisfactory attendance levels in some schools and in the later years of secondary education. The EWS is generally effective and well regarded by primary schools and most secondary schools. However, it is judged to be unsatisfactory by a significant minority of secondary schools. A small number of secondary schools are not clear about the basis of EWS support.

106. Attendance data are collected and analysed carefully, and additional support has been provided for schools where attendance is a particular concern. Three-quarters of the primary schools visited during the inspection have received effective support in improving attendance. The picture is less positive in secondary schools. All the secondary schools visited were making considerable efforts to promote good attendance. In two of the secondary schools, despite such effort, recent inspections highlighted poor attendance. In both schools high rates of authorised and unauthorised absence are concentrated among a few pupils. The EWS has rightly taken vigorous action including prosecution to encourage parents to send their children to school but with little success. The promotion of good attendance needs more effective strategies, particularly for secondary schools.

107. Responsibility for action on behaviour management and exclusions is dispersed amongst a wide range of services. However, there are no agreed policies, procedures or a common data base. This lack of strategic coordination reduces efficiency, effectiveness and dissemination.

108. Support to improve pupils' behaviour and the use of exclusions is regarded by primary schools as satisfactory. Secondary schools consider support on behaviour as poor but see the advice given on appropriate practice in the use of exclusions as better than satisfactory.

109. The LEA has focused its support for behaviour management, including monitoring and training, in PRUs, primary schools and schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It has carried out a thorough review of the management of positive behaviour in primary schools and highlighted many successful strategies that individual schools had developed. These initiatives, coupled with relevant support materials, have improved behaviour support in primary schools. The LEA has also given satisfactory support to PRUs and EBD schools. However, it has not had the capacity to support secondary schools, apart from *ad hoc*, sometimes

effective, support by EWS and education psychologists for pupils with behavioural problems. More generally, staff feel insufficiently supported and poorly informed about effective strategies to support pupils at risk. As a result, there are inconsistent in-school solutions to permanent exclusion or repeated fixed term exclusions. Notwithstanding this, the LEA and its schools have been successful in reducing the number of exclusions. The level of permanent exclusions, in both primary and secondary schools, is well below the national average. The rate of fixed term exclusion is average.

110. The LEA's support to PRUs and EBD schools is generally satisfactory. The PRU for boys with EBD, who have been permanently excluded from mainstream education, is based on effective partnership with Barnardo's. The steering group evaluates the work of the PRU and ensures that it complies with all DfEE requirements but there is need for greater consultation between the head of the Unit and the LEA. The Primary Inclusion Initiative, a small piece of work jointly run between Barnardo's and Rotherham LEA, is proving successful in improving behaviour and attendance in the primary sector, thereby reducing exclusion of children from schools.

111. The first behaviour support plan was limited. Consultation on the plan was insufficient and ineffective. Many secondary and special schools' headteachers feel poorly informed and inadequately consulted. The behaviour support plan gives an honest appraisal of existing provision and intentions but it lacks coordinated strategic planning, details of how actions will be implemented and reliable data on pupil numbers, attendance, exclusions and success criteria. The revised plan drawn up by the new behaviour support manager has addressed some but not all of these weaknesses. The new guidelines issued to schools provide an effective framework for dealing with disruptive behaviour before resorting to exclusions. Despite evidence of some imaginative approaches to promote good behaviour, schools do not have agreed policies and procedures, supported by guidance and training, against which to analyse and evaluate their practice.

112. The LEA works effectively in partnership with other agencies to fulfil its child protection responsibilities well. Training and record keeping are good. At least one teacher in each school has attended a course on child protection.

113. Liaison with the Social Services Department (SSD) on the education provision for looked-after children has only recently been based on an agreed common strategy. This is the local authority's Management Action Plan for Looked-After Children, jointly endorsed by both executive directors of Social Services and Education, Leisure and Cultural Services. Three hundred and thirty-eight pupils are children looked-after by the Council. The vast majority of these are in foster homes and in receipt of full-time education. Of the 26 pupils in residential units, five were not in schools at the time of the inspection but were receiving individual tuition. The education provision for these children, in the form of a few hours home-tuition, is inadequate. An Education Liaison Officer, jointly funded by the education department and SSD, has been appointed to oversee the educational provision for looked-after children to maximise their attainment.

114. The LEA's support is at least satisfactory in targeted schools with a significant number of bilingual pupils. Those learning English as an additional language make

sound progress in acquiring language skills in the early stages. There is a marked under-achievement amongst pupils, especially girls, from minority ethnic heritage. Effective strategies are not sufficiently developed to raise their attainment.

115. The LEA has issued guidelines on multicultural education (1989) and combating racist incidents (1995). Schools have responded positively by formulating their own policies on equal opportunities and acceptable behaviour. The positive ethos in the schools visited supports the view that there is a good degree of harmony at all levels. Ethnic minority groups are under-represented on governing bodies and in the senior management of the Education Department and schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve school premises (paragraphs 89-96):

- the aggregated costs of improvements identified in the school condition survey, and to be summarised in the Asset Management Plan, should be immediately incorporated into the Council's capital strategy;
- immediate and energetic efforts should be made to explore the full range of external funding and strategic partnership opportunities;
- schools should be actively involved as partners in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the authority's capital strategy; and
- regular co-ordinated, comprehensive and clear summaries of action and intentions should be issued to schools.

In order to ensure that the management of school places is effective (paragraphs 97-98):

- action for review should be linked to more specific benchmarks, timescales, reporting mechanisms and assigned responsibilities.

In order to assist the exercise of informed parental choice with the least disruption to the provision of efficient and effective education (paragraphs 99-101):

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

In order to bring about improved support for attendance the EWS, with the help of schools should (paragraphs 104-106):

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

In order to strengthen the support to improve pupils' behaviour steps should be taken to (paragraphs 107-111):

- ensure strategic coordination of the total provision;
- develop a common database which is accessible to all stakeholders;
- provide information and training on consistent policies and procedures to secondary schools; and
- reduce the time lag between pupils' exclusion and alternative provision.

In order to reduce social exclusion (paragraph 113):

- all looked-after children should be given an adequate education.

To take better account of ethnic diversity and to promote the attainment of all sections of the community, steps should be taken to (paragraphs 114-115):

- develop strategies to monitor and challenge under-achievement amongst pupils, particularly girls, from minority ethnic heritage;
- facilitate effective liaison between key stages to build on earlier progress made; and
- improve monitoring and reporting of race equality issues.

APPENDIX

Recommendations

In order to increase the impact of education development planning (paragraphs 25-30):

- the activities in the EDP should be made more internally coherent, include better success criteria, and should be targeted more precisely at schools in need;
- schools should be assisted further to develop effective target setting procedures; and
- the EDP's priorities should, where appropriate, be linked to other borough and education service plans.

In order to ensure schools are resourced to discharge their responsibilities to support and increase the achievement of pupils (paragraphs 19-21):

- the level of funding available for schools should be reviewed in the light of a rigorous analysis of their needs and the Council's priorities.

In order to help schools exercise their autonomy, offer them greater flexibility and choice, and to ensure greater incentive to secure cost effectiveness of bought-back services (paragraphs 31-32):

- the pricing and service specifications for delegated management services should be reviewed and improved.

In order to make more efficient the setting of performance targets for pupils (paragraphs 39-42):

- written guidelines should be prepared to help schools to use data in target setting; and
- liaison advisers should be trained to offer more consistent support and advice to schools in order to help them set challenging but realistic targets.

In order to raise standards in schools (paragraphs 43-52):

- LEA support programmes should be systematically evaluated to determine that they are effective and targeted best to meet needs;
- improved support for mathematics teaching in secondary schools should be secured;
- a corporate strategy should be drawn up for ICT which co-ordinates all the curricular and administrative strands in ICT, to provide a more consistent, cost effective and efficient service;
- support for ICT in the curriculum should be targeted to where the needs are greatest; and
- the EDP should be given a clearer ICT rationale, better defined tasks and success criteria against which it can be monitored and evaluated.

In order to improve further the existing good provision for early years (paragraphs 66-67):

- the involvement of parents in early assessment should be improved.

In order to promote collaboration to improve schools, Councillors and senior officers should (paragraphs 68-70, 74):

- clarify the strategic direction of the education service; and
- develop further a climate of cooperation amongst all stakeholders to improve provision and standards in the borough.

In order to streamline and improve the effectiveness of planning (paragraphs 71-75):

- a corporate plan that sets education in the context of the Council's efforts to stimulate regeneration should be drawn up, published and used as a basis for service planning and evaluation; and
- external advice should be sought by the education service to improve and streamline its strategic planning capability.

In order to meet statutory requirements and to assist schools in the deployment of their budgets and the accountability of governors (paragraph 77):

- the local authority's Section 52 statement and schools' budget statements should record the notional special needs budget for each school.

In order to enable schools better to understand the school budget share allocations and to make more informed decisions about the deployment of their budgets (paragraph 77):

- the notification of school budget shares should enable schools more readily to assess the basis for their allocation; and
- schools should be assisted by benchmarking information about resource and staffing deployment.

In order to ensure the most effective use of data, reduce unnecessary duplication and communication inefficiencies, and to secure best value for time and money (paragraph 79):

- early and co-ordinated action should be taken to establish a coherent and integrated ICT strategy which takes full account of schools' needs; and
- a coherent ICT system should be introduced for the recording of data about individual pupils in order to help schools and the LEA monitor pupils' progress more easily, and to be able to transfer data to and from the LEA more efficiently.

In order to improve the provision for SEN steps should be taken to (paragraphs 82-88):

- develop and implement a strategic plan for SEN and communicate this clearly with LEA personnel, school staff and governors;
- clarify the criteria for the requirement for statutory assessment;
- implement all recommendations of the District Audit report; and take steps to embed them in the work of the schools; and
- clarify SEN funding for mainstream schools.

In order to improve school premises (paragraphs 89-96):

- the aggregated costs of improvements identified in the school condition survey, and to be summarised in the Asset Management Plan, should be immediately incorporated into the Council's capital strategy;
- immediate and energetic efforts should be made to explore the full range of external funding and strategic partnership opportunities;
- schools should be actively involved as partners in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the authority's capital strategy; and
- regular co-ordinated, comprehensive and clear summaries of action and intentions should be issued to schools.

In order to ensure that the management of school places is effective (paragraphs 97-98):

- action for review should be linked to more specific benchmarks, timescales, reporting mechanisms and assigned responsibilities.

In order to assist the exercise of informed parental choice with the least disruption to the provision of efficient and effective education (paragraphs 99-101):

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

In order to bring about improved support for attendance the EWS, with the help of schools, should (paragraphs 104-106):

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

In order to strengthen the support to improve pupils' behaviour, steps should be taken to (paragraphs 107-111):

- ensure strategic coordination of the total provision;
- develop a common database which is accessible to all stakeholders;
- provide information and training on consistent policies and procedures to secondary schools; and

- reduce the time lag between pupils' exclusion and alternative provision.

In order to reduce social exclusion (paragraph 113):

- all looked-after children should be given an adequate education.

To take better account of ethnic diversity and to promote the attainment of all sections of the community, steps should be taken to (paragraphs 114-115):

- develop strategies to monitor and challenge under-achievement amongst pupils, particularly girls, from minority ethnic heritage;
- facilitate effective liaison between key stages to build on earlier progress made; and
- improve monitoring and reporting of race equality issues.

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