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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
SHEFFIELD
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Sheffield local education authority (LEA) 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 (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in the autumn term 1999.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included: school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from the LEA. Discussions were held with: LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers; and staff in other departments at that local authority. Other agencies and LEA partners, including a diocesan representative, participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier OFSTED/Audit Commission report on this LEA, published in February 2000. A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 188 schools and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 62 per cent.

COMMENTARY

3. The city of Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England, with a population of over 500,000. In common with other major cities, it faces significant challenges of urban development, and is subject to the complex and fast moving agenda of national, regional, European and local initiatives that have been made available to help improve urban areas. It has begun to experience an economic upturn after 15 years of decline following the demise of the steel, coal and engineering industries. Investment in the city is accelerating. Nevertheless, a third of the city's wards are amongst the most deprived nationally and levels of employment and income are still well below average. Since the last inspection in 1999, the numbers of primary age pupils have fallen significantly, often affecting most those schools in disadvantaged areas.

4. Overall, standards are still lower than national averages at every key stage and vary greatly between schools. As the LEA acknowledges, overall improvement in primary schools is still too low. The rate of improvement until 2001 had generally been in line with the national trend. In 2001, the overall gap between the city and national performance widened slightly, particularly at Key Stage 2. However, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs improved at a faster rate than nationally.

5. The number of schools causing OFSTED significant concern has reduced since the last inspection. The percentage of pupils who stay on in education and training after the age of 16 has also improved significantly and is now broadly in line with that nationally. School attendance, however, remains stubbornly low, and the rate of exclusions from schools remains a problem.

6. The last inspection found that the LEA was beginning to tackle significant problems following a history of financial difficulties and poor budget management by the local authority. There had been improvement but much remained to be done. Though the team believed the LEA had the capacity to improve, its weaknesses, particularly in provision for its most vulnerable children, outweighed its strengths.

7. The LEA has come a long way in the relatively short time since the last inspection, both in tackling the agenda for change affecting all urban LEAs and in successfully tackling most of the formidable agenda for improvement set by the previous inspection. It has responded positively to all the recommendations made in the previous report. It has made at least satisfactory progress in almost all areas of its work, and good progress in the great majority of areas that were previously weak. The LEA's strengths now significantly outweigh its weaknesses. Leadership has been firm and determined; senior officers and members have set clear priorities for the development of the LEA. There is a strong but supportive culture of accountability throughout the council and its education services, and arrangements to secure Best Value in council and LEA services are good. This is now a well run LEA.

8. Several functions carried out well at the time of the last inspection were still judged to be performing at the same level by the LEA and schools, and were not re-inspected. Of the functions inspected, the LEA now discharges the following well:

- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- assuring the quality and supply of teachers;
- performance management of services to support school improvement;
- admissions to schools and supply of school places;
- securing the health, welfare and protection of children;
- support for children in public care;
- corporate planning, and the implementation and evaluation of that planning;
- leadership of elected members and senior officers, and decision making;
- promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value; and
- partnerships and collaboration with agencies in order to meet its priorities.

9. Almost all remaining functions are now carried out at least satisfactorily or highly satisfactorily. However, the following functions continue to be inadequately discharged:

- provision for education otherwise than at school;
- support for behaviour; and
- ensuring value for money from support for SEN.

10. Overall, the LEA has responded positively to improve performance when needed, for example in its rapid response to the disappointing recent performance of primary schools. Its revised inclusion strategy, and restructured access and inclusion services, now have the potential to provide more effective support to schools and to its most vulnerable pupils. Schools have waited a long time for these developments and have yet to see many of the benefits. Nevertheless, they are far more confident than before that the LEA's strategies will succeed.

11. Members and officers have a clear, shared, vision which places raising educational standards at the heart of the social and economic regeneration of the city. This is reflected in coherent and, in many respects, innovative corporate initiatives and in the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Despite continuing financial constraints, the council has ensured that funding has matched its priorities for education. The LEA's success in attracting new sources of funding is now substantially benefiting schools and pupils, particularly in the secondary sector. Schools are now better involved in educational decision making, and their trust in the LEA, and in its senior officers, has continued to develop.

12. The LEA has demonstrated that it can improve rapidly. It has created a number of innovative partnerships to support school improvement. Several developments are still new and some strategies, though well planned, have still to be fully implemented or to have an impact. However, the inspection team is confident that the LEA has the ability to improve further and to respond to the recommendations in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. The city of Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England, with a population of over 500,000. It has begun to experience an economic upturn after 15 years of decline following the demise of the steel, coal and engineering industries. Investment in the city is accelerating. Nevertheless, the city remains in the bottom four per cent of authorities nationally in levels of employment and income. There are high concentrations of local deprivation. A third of the city's wards are amongst the ten per cent most deprived nationally and continue to include some of the poorest housing estates in the country. Since the last inspection, falling rolls have begun to have a significant impact on the primary sector, particularly on schools in disadvantaged areas.

14. The percentage of primary and secondary aged children who are eligible for a free school meal remains higher than nationally and in statistical neighbours¹. The proportion of pupils of minority ethnic origin (12.3 per cent) is in line with national figures and well above that in similar LEAs. The percentage of primary and secondary aged pupils with a statement of special educational need (SEN) continues to be in line with national averages and similar LEAs. However, the proportion of pupils staying on into post-16 provision has improved since the last inspection. The proportion in education and training (85 per cent) is now broadly in line with that nationally, and the proportion in full-time education (66 per cent) is now only five per cent below the national average.

15. Sheffield LEA maintains five nursery schools, 147 primary schools, 27 secondary schools, 14 special schools and one pupil referral unit (PRU). Around 8 per cent of pupils below school age are on the roll of primary schools. Seven secondary schools provide post-16 education; the remainder of 16-19 provision in the city has been provided by Sheffield College of Further Education but a proposal for a sixth form college to serve the North East of the city is currently under consideration by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

16. There have been a number of significant developments since the last inspection. Seven schools have now achieved Beacon status and eight secondary schools have been granted specialist status. The authority has two Fresh Start schools. These are now two large Education Action Zones (EAZs) operating in the LEA, involving a total of 40 schools. The Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative, only just implemented at the time of the last inspection, is now fully imbedded. In addition to providing support for all secondary and just over 40 per cent of primary schools, the initiative currently involves a further three small EAZs, and five city learning centres, three of which are currently operational. Excellence Challenge has been operating since September 2001, extending the EiC initiative into the post-16 sector. Sheffield is piloting the introduction of local public service agreements (LPSA). This

¹ Sheffield's statistical neighbours are: Sunderland, Leeds, North Tyneside, Stockton on Tees, Tameside, Newcastle, Bolton, Rotherham, Wigan and Gateshead.

includes three enhanced education targets: for raising attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4, and raising the attainment of children in public care in GCSE examinations.

Performance

17. The overall performance of schools remains below national averages in all key stages although, in Key Stages 3 & 4, it is broadly in line with statistical neighbours. The rate of improvement over the last five years has generally been in line with the national trend. However, results in 2001 have had an impact on the rate of improvement since the last inspection. At Key Stage 2, the gap between the LEA's performance and that nationally has widened slightly and, at Key Stage 4, that gap has reduced, significantly so in some respects.

18. The LEA's baseline assessment data shows that pupils' attainment on entry to school is broadly in line with that nationally. However, this masks very considerable differences across the city and, overall, the number of children with higher levels of attainment entering Sheffield schools is lower than average.

19. At Key Stage 1, attainment in national tests for reading, writing and mathematics is below the national average. The rate of improvement over time had been above that nationally and in similar LEAs but, in 2001, the gap between the performance of Sheffield schools and those nationally widened slightly in writing and mathematics. The percentage of pupils achieving higher levels in writing has risen more rapidly than nationally.

20. At Key Stage 2, attainment in science is below the national average. Results in English and mathematics declined in 2001 and are well below those nationally. The LEA exceeded its 2000 targets for the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 and above in English and mathematics but its targets for 2002 are not now realistically achievable.

21. At Key Stage 3, attainment is below national averages but is broadly in line with similar LEAs. The rate of improvement over time has been in line with that nationally and, in English, has been faster than the national rate.

22. GCSE results are below national averages, but the average point score per pupil and the proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A*-C (42.4 per cent) are now broadly in line with statistical neighbours. Rates of improvement over time have fluctuated but, since the last inspection, have been greater than nationally and in similar LEAs. The LEA came close to achieving its 2000 target for the proportion of pupils achieving 5+A*-C grades (43 per cent) and for the proportion achieving 1+A*-G grades (93 per cent). Nevertheless, it will still require a faster rate of improvement to reach its 2002 targets.

23. The attainment of pupils taking GCE Advanced level continues to be above that nationally and has improved at a faster rate than nationally and in similar LEAs.

24. The performance of ethnic minority groups is similar to that of all pupils in Key Stage 1. Overall, it is ten per cent below that of pupils of UK, European and other heritages by Key Stage 2. By Key Stage 4, the gap in performance of pupils of Black

African heritage is particularly acute. The difference in performance between boys and girls varies across key stages and is also most marked in ethnic minority groups.

25. OFSTED inspections show that the percentage of Sheffield primary schools (52 per cent) and secondary schools (58 per cent) judged to be good or very good is below that nationally (70 per cent and 66 per cent respectively). However, with the exception of the overall climate of primary schools, there has been an improvement between first and second inspections. The quality of teaching has improved. The overall quality of education provided by secondary schools is now above the national average and there has been a significant improvement in the management and efficiency of secondary schools.

26. Rates of attendance in primary schools (93.4 per cent) in 2000 remained stubbornly below the national average (94.3 per cent), and attendance in secondary schools (89.1 per cent) was well below that nationally (91.4 per cent). Levels of unauthorised absence were also above those found nationally and in similar LEAs. LEA data for 2000-2001 indicates that these figures are beginning to improve. Permanent exclusions from primary and secondary are broadly in line with the national average.

Council structure

27. Political control of the city council continues to rest with the Liberal Democrats. In May 2000, the council adopted the model of a cabinet and leader as its preferred response to the Government's agenda for modernising local government. The 10 member cabinet includes an executive member with responsibility for Education and Training. The council has also established 12 area panels with cross-party and community membership. Cabinet meetings are open to public scrutiny and petitions.

28. Cabinet reports can be 'called in' for scrutiny by any council member. There are six scrutiny boards, with cross-party membership, which monitor and review corporate decision-making, the delivery of corporate priorities, and service standards. The Service Standards: Education and Social Services Scrutiny Board has recently widened its remit to include health, in order to scrutinise the delivery of all corporate work impacting on the council's wide range of social policies, including education. The Strategic Planning and Performance Management Scrutiny Board maintains an overview of corporate planning and developments, the performance of all services and the council's organisation of performance review, including arrangements to secure Best Value.

Funding

29. Sheffield's education standard spending assessment (SSA) is below the national average but is supplemented by additional funding secured from a variety of national and European sources, and managed through a well co-ordinated strategy.

30. The overall position on school funding is similar to that at the time of the last inspection. However, the picture presented then of a council recently beset by mid year spending freezes no longer applies. The council does, nevertheless, remain in difficult financial circumstances. Council departments other than education continue to be subject to strict expenditure controls, and low levels of financial balances are

maintained. The resulting increase in proportional funding to education means that the council has been able to pass on fully to schools the increases in the education SSA. In 2001-02, spending on education is just over the SSA. The legacy of previous capital borrowing means, however, that capital financing is over twice the SSA.

31. Provision for early years is a priority. In 2001-02, expenditure on under-fives and on primary schools is over SSA, at 110 and 104 per cent respectively, with the 11-15 age group and post-16 below, at 96 and 80 per cent. Though it has made efforts to improve post-16 funding for the seven schools with sixth forms, at the time of transfer of the responsibility to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) that sector is comparatively poorly resourced. Sheffield spends more than average on SEN.

32. Individual school budgets per pupil in 2000-01 were below average in both primary and secondary schools. The council funded £1771 per primary pupil, as opposed to an average of £1811 for statistical neighbours, £1795 for metropolitan LEAs and £1869 for England. The equivalent secondary figures were: £2311 Sheffield, £2431 statistical neighbours, £2471 metropolitan LEAs, and £2559 England.

33. The level of delegation to schools in 2000-01 was 83.5 per cent, slightly below the average for statistical neighbours (84.5 per cent), metropolitan LEAs (84 per cent) and England (83.8 per cent). However, Sheffield has met the Secretary of State's targets for spending. Retained funding on central administration has increased from £43 per pupil in 2000-01 to £49 in 2001-02, and thus from well below the average of other LEAs to about the norm. This additional expenditure in part reflects an increase in staffing which has contributed to the improvement in performance in some key areas referred to later in this report.

34. Sheffield's efforts to attract external funding have been impressive, and will be enhanced by the imminent establishment of an education grants administration unit. Fourteen per cent of total school funding now comes from external sources. All Sheffield's secondary schools will each receive about £900,000 over six years to enhance learning in Key Stage 4. This comes from a European Union grant (Objective 1) to aid declining communities. This is the first time that an LEA has been successful in making such funding available as part of statutory schooling.

35. Expenditure on school premises has also been enhanced by external funding, which includes a potential £1.75m towards a proposal to establish a new college for post-16 students in the north east of the city. The council has increased its own spending to address the issue of the poor condition of much of the building stock.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

36. The previous inspection judged the LEA's Educational Development Plan (EDP) to be inadequate. Although it was based on a satisfactory audit of need and progress in half of the 10 priorities had been satisfactory, the strategy failed to reflect precisely enough what needed to be done in the local context to raise attainment, particularly with regard to underachieving schools and groups. Links between activities were not clearly enough established, the plan lacked coherence and was

insufficiently phased to enable manageable implementation by schools. Some schools were not aware of its contents, others found it difficult to find a route through the strategy. The inspection recommended that the LEA redraft the EDP in consultation with schools to devise a strategy which reflected local needs and took into account EiC, EAZ and the Behaviour Support Plan (BSP), and the current rate of progress in meeting 2002 targets.

37. The LEA's revised strategy for school improvement is now sound and has a number of strengths. Working with the DfES and outside consultants, the LEA has re-written the EDP. This reduced the number of priorities to five: *Raising attainment in English and mathematics at KS4 and overall; Inclusion; Teaching and learning; Leadership, management and governance; and School improvement.* The EDP was approved in December 2000, to run until April 2002.

38. Consultation with schools has helped to clarify the EDP's strategic role. Reports on the progress of the EDP have been presented to headteachers and other stakeholders. EDP programmes have been reviewed with representatives of schools, leading to some further reframing of activities. Schools feel that there has been improvement since the last inspection; around half judging consultation on the strategy, its clarity, and the relevance of priorities to their school to be good.

39. Strategies reflect local circumstances and corporate priorities well, and appropriately emphasise raising attainment and social inclusion. There are sufficiently clear links between targets, actions and overarching priorities. There is a strong focus on performance indicators, and these are well linked to performance management systems within the education directorate. The allocation of responsibilities is clear, timescales are more sensible, costs more clearly defined, and the majority of success criteria have been sharpened. The performance of underachieving groups is effectively targeted, although targets for these groups in the EDP are not yet sufficiently differentiated.

40. The EDP is well integrated with the majority of other key educational plans and with corporate and strategic initiatives, including the PSA. The BSP is the exception, but there are clear plans to address this within the new EDP and in revisions to the BSP. Links with EiC and EAZ plans are now clearer and more explicit. In the case of EiC, however, this is not yet specifically interwoven into activity strands; implementation is more effective than planning in this respect. The work of the two large EAZs is very effectively integrated. Support for pupils with special educational needs is woven into relevant EDP priorities and activities.

41. Nevertheless, there remain some weaknesses in the current EDP. The LEA's overarching strategy requires close collaboration and multi-disciplinary working to integrate support for raising attainment and the inclusion of its most disadvantaged and disaffected pupils. However, in attempting to achieve the degree of co-ordination required, the EDP continues to build in too much overlap between some actions and activities.

42. The strategy for raising attainment at Key Stage 4 links activities to raise attainment and support for social inclusion well, but is not as explicit in other key stages. The EDP now provides a more effective planning and management

framework for the LEA. However, it is still not easy for schools to independently use the EDP as a planning tool to access the LEA's resources to support their own improvement. Therefore the EDP still does not support fully the LEA's clear intention of increasing the autonomy of schools. Planning for the next EDP indicates that the LEA is actively seeking to address this issue.

43. Monitoring and evaluation of the EDP have been strengthened as a result of improvements in the clarity and range of LEA targets. Monitoring reports are reviewed regularly by the education directorate, elected members, and stakeholders. Reports now have a clear and consistent format and recent reports have adopted Best Value principles in order to challenge comparative performance more robustly. Performance against targets is effectively evaluated and reported. However, there is not always sufficient analysis of how strategies or actions might need to be re-prioritised or amended to tackle factors that potentially affect progress or developments.

44. Overall, the LEA has made satisfactory progress in implementing its strategy for school improvement. Good progress has been made in a number of key areas judged to be unsatisfactory in the last inspection, and in implementing a number of key strategic initiatives. Nevertheless, despite its best efforts, the LEA has not succeeded in fulfilling its prime objective of raising attainment at the rate needed to meet its 2002 targets. In Key stage 4, it has been effective and results have improved significantly. However, the rise in standards at Key Stage 2 has stalled and the LEA is unlikely to achieve its targets for 2002.

45. The LEA has responded quickly and positively to the disappointing performance in Key Stage 2 this year. It has reviewed its data on the performance of schools and strengthened its primary strategy to increase work on improving management and teaching and learning, including assessment and target setting. Schools have accepted both the strategy and the challenges it sets. The main thrust of the new strategy is appropriate, but is still not sufficiently clear how, precisely, services supporting social inclusion, or related initiatives such as EiC and EAZ, will be interwoven and targeted to support schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve monitoring of progress of the school improvement strategy and efforts to accelerate progress:

- monitoring reports on the EDP should be sharpened to provide clearer analysis of how strategies and actions may require strengthening or amendment; and
- the school improvement strategy, and associated primary strategy, should demonstrate clearly how the work of services supporting social inclusion, and other initiatives, will be interwoven and targeted to support schools.

The allocation of resources to priorities

46. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's allocation of resources to priorities was unsatisfactory. Particular concern was expressed about the appropriateness of the funding formula for schools, about procedures to deal with schools with deficit

budgets and the control and financial planning of the SEN budget. Resourcing for the improvement of building stock was also criticised.

47. The LEA now allocates resources to priorities very satisfactorily and has made good progress in a number of areas, for example through innovative action to provide matched funding to secure external grants. The weaknesses identified in the last inspection have, in large part, been addressed and further improvements are in hand, in particular for SEN and asset management.

48. Financial management within the council operates on an annual cycle. There are appropriate arrangements for review and monitoring of the budget which have been assisted by the installation of a new financial information system. Overall, in 2000-01 there was no overspend in the education budget and no overspend is expected for 2001-02. The council has sound systems for medium term financial planning and intends to develop improved mechanisms for integrating of financial and service planning. Against a difficult financial background there has been active resource management to support priorities such as SEN, the private finance initiative (PFI), improved ICT facilities and to strengthen the school advisory and inspection team (SAIS). Additional resources have been made available for education and existing resources have been reallocated.

49. The formula for funding schools has improved following the introduction for 2001-02 of a new activity led model, agreed in close consultation with schools. The formula is clearer, more transparent, and provides a sound base for future development. Plans are in hand to extend delegation to schools to 90 per cent of the local schools budget in 2003-04.

50. The specific problem of some secondary schools' deficit budgets identified in the last inspection, was initially addressed by implementing the recommendations of a consultancy report and then through the revised funding formula. School balances are reasonable. The number of schools in deficit at the end of 2000-01 had significantly reduced to four per cent of primary, 11 per cent of secondary, and no special schools. Plans are in place to monitor individual school balances where they are above five per cent of the delegated budget. The school survey judged the LEA's performance on almost all strategic financial issues to be satisfactory or better, and in all their responses schools were more satisfied than at the time of the last inspection.

Structure for achieving Best Value

51. Arrangements to secure Best Value and for continuous review of the work of the council and the LEA are good, and have improved since the last inspection. The council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2001-02, like the initial plan for 2000-01, received an unqualified approval from the external auditor. It sets out a clear, comprehensive survey of the council's priorities and performance. The programme for the selection of reviews is well targeted and is correctly amended in the light of any new circumstances. As yet, just one education Best Value review has been completed, on SEN support services (see Appendix 2). This has been conducted with the necessary rigour and an effective improvement plan is leading to more efficient service delivery.

52. The LEA acknowledges that it has more to do in helping schools ensure that they implement Best Value principles in securing services, but has made a sound start with its programme to increase schools' awareness of Best Value. Satisfactory progress has been made in advising schools on the fulfilment of their Best Value responsibilities through a well attended series of training events for heads and governors and the publication of a statement of good practice for schools.

53. Systems for the continuous review of performance are very good. The last inspection found that mechanisms for performance management and review at the corporate level were clear, realistic and straightforward. However, it recommended that service planning in the education directorate needed to be consolidated to ensure more effective monitoring of the implementation of service planning, and the consistency and quality of services. Work undertaken as part of the best managed council programme and in developing clear and effective guidance on performance review, through its Sheffield manager package, has improved and strengthened the corporate performance management framework and ensures accountability, challenge and ownership. The education directorate is implementing this framework very effectively.

54. A policy and performance unit within the directorate oversees the performance management framework. This ensures the cohesion of corporate, directorate, service, section and individual planning, and the setting of appropriate targets and performance indicators. The directorate has adopted the European Foundation Quality Mark (EFQM) as its overall quality framework and, since the last inspection, has been using OFSTED inspection criteria for quarterly monitoring of service planning, delivery and improvement. Effective use is made of designated quality assurance co-ordinators to support development and planning and monitor standards in each service area. These systems are well managed, rigorously applied, and being systematically consolidated in all service areas. Good arrangements are in place for regular review of the process, and performance, by elected members.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary

55. Overall, the LEA's school improvement functions are now carried out competently. Many are carried out well. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and in some areas good progress has been made in bringing functions up to an acceptable standard. The LEA is now better able to monitor, challenge and support schools in their evaluation of performance and efforts to improve, and to meet the needs of underperforming schools and groups of pupils. Its strategies for raising attainment are appropriate and, in some respects, innovative. It has used funding and resources from a wide range of initiatives imaginatively in order to improve services to schools and to help them in their efforts to raise standards. EiC has been a significant catalyst in the LEA's work with schools, and in developing new patterns of collaborative working. Nevertheless, despite the LEA's best efforts recent standards in primary schools have not risen fast enough. The costs of the core services providing support for school improvement are average. Returns on the council's investment in these services are not yet as high as the LEA intends, but they provide satisfactory value for money.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

56. The previous inspection judged the LEA's monitoring, challenge, and support to schools, and its intervention where necessary, to be sound. Nevertheless, the inspection recommended securing greater consistency in challenging schools, maximising the use of available evidence in differentiating this process, and securing greater consistency in school self-evaluation. Sufficient progress has been made on all these recommendations. The LEA's provision is now highly satisfactory and has a number of strengths.

57. Schools are clear on the procedures for monitoring, intervention and challenge. They are clearly set out, along with revised guidelines on school performance review process, and criteria to judge whether intervention is necessary. Support from the advisory and inspection service is well targeted at the areas of greatest need and schools are clear on what they can expect to receive. Support for pupils with behavioural problems in primary schools, and for pupils excluded from school, has not been as well targeted. However strategies now in place have the potential to improve this.

58. The school performance review process remains at the heart of the LEA's work with schools. It draws appropriately on the wide range of evidence the LEA now holds about its schools. This includes performance data and targets for: pupil attainment; the curriculum; specific groups of pupils such as those in public care or from ethnic minorities; and for attendance and exclusions. In addition, the performance review covers the quality of teaching and learning, and EiC and EAZ programmes where appropriate. All schools are categorised in one of five groups according to their performance. Schools with the greatest need receive more time and attention and detailed guidelines for link advisers ensures a suitable degree of consistency in the way the review process is conducted.

59. The LEA is, rightly, committed to the notion of developing autonomous self-managing schools. Schools' own evaluation of their performance is a key element of the LEA's strategy. The performance review report is a joint statement by headteacher and link adviser. The LEA has been supporting schools in the development of self-evaluation processes for around three years, using the OFSTED self-evaluation framework. Most advisers have been trained as EFQM assessors. Guidance to schools on self-evaluation is good and the LEA has been working with schools to develop more detailed guidance, supplemented with local material developed by schools, that is shortly to be published. The LEA's monitoring data indicates that self-evaluation is satisfactory in around 83 per cent of schools. This is a clear improvement since the last inspection. The LEA is using this data effectively to target its revised strategy to raise standards in primary schools more rapidly.

60. Schools that are identified as requiring additional support receive this through LEA centrally held funds, with provision either made directly by the LEA, or by other agencies secured by the LEA. Advisers recommend support from outside the LEA for schools to purchase where this is appropriate. A very recent document issued in January 2002 sets out more clearly the LEA's commitment to partnership. This partnership compact emphasises that, whilst remaining accountable to the wider community successful schools will be given as much freedom as possible to manage their own development. The LEA is implementing proposals for further differentiating and reducing its monitoring visits to these schools in line with the Code of Practice in LEA/school relations.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

61. The LEA's use of performance data to assist in monitoring and challenging schools to improve, continues to be sound. The LEA is making better use of monitoring data to differentiate and target its support to schools and has made good progress in developing a central pupil database. Pupil performance data is transferred automatically from schools to the LEA. Good progress has been made in developing the range of data used to help primary and secondary schools set targets and monitor their own performance. However, special schools have not been sufficiently involved in these developments.

62. Data is well presented, produced to a clearly understood timescale and in good time to support the review process and target setting by schools and the LEA. There has been effective training to help schools use the data provided. Link advisers make good use of data to challenge schools. The gap between schools' aggregated targets and those set by the LEA is reducing. However, locally benchmarked data to help staff and governors in the management of the school on, for example, curriculum issues such as organisation and staffing, is not so well developed as that on attainment.

63. The LEA's 'City Assessment Framework', implemented in 2001, contained important initiatives to introduce national interim tests in Year 4 and Year 7 to help schools improve the tracking of pupils' progress and target setting. The Framework was key to the LEA's strategy to raise expectations of pupils' performance, and to provide better evidence for challenging schools' targets and redress the gap between their targets and its own. However, advice from teacher associations to their

members on implementing the additional assessment and monitoring procedures has slowed down the implementation of the LEA's strategy in secondary schools and has, inevitably, detracted from its impact.

64. The work of the LEA in challenging special schools on the basis of performance data and benchmarked targets is insufficiently developed. The Key Stage 3 strategy specifically targets the development of improved assessment in SEN. However, at present, special schools are not adequately supported in setting challenging targets for all their pupils and the LEA is not able to provide these schools with the same degree of challenge as it can for most of its schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the LEA's ability to monitor and challenge all schools:

- a framework for setting targets to measure pupil progress in special schools should be agreed with head teachers and training for its implementation be provided.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

65. The previous inspection judged the LEA's support for under-performing schools to be sound overall, but there were weaknesses. The report made a number of recommendations to secure further improvement, including: developing a stepped approach to the identification of schools causing concern; improving the skills of advisers in the early identification of possible difficulties in schools; and extending the use of associate headteachers. Satisfactory progress has been made in addressing these recommendations. The LEA now provides highly satisfactory, and in some respects, very effective support to its under-performing schools and those in challenging circumstances. That support has the capacity to improve further.

66. Overall, the LEA now has an effective approach to identifying and supporting schools causing concern. Schools identified by the LEA as requiring additional support receive well planned and co-ordinated action which is effectively tailored to their specific needs. The progress of these schools is regularly reviewed. A schedule has been published to all schools and helpful monitoring reports are made available to heads and governors. The LEA makes effective use of associate headteachers, for example, where there have been senior staff vacancies or when schools have been identified as in need of intensive support, and they have had a positive impact on school performance.

67. Link advisers are now more confident in identifying schools with difficulties at an early stage. The LEA has intervened effectively in 20 schools identified as causing concern in the last 15 months. These schools have received timely and good quality support and made sufficient improvement to receive at least satisfactory OFSTED reports. The first of the two Fresh Start schools has recently been judged by OFSTED to have made good progress. The LEA has used its statutory powers appropriately to appoint additional governors and withdraw delegation, and in requesting a formal OFSTED inspection of a school causing it concern.

68. Overall, the number of schools in the LEA requiring special measures has decreased from nine to five since the last inspection. No secondary schools remain in special measures or have serious weaknesses. Nevertheless, in the last 15 months two primary schools where the LEA was aware of difficulties and was taking action have been deemed to require special measures. Three other primary schools require special measures and nine schools have serious weaknesses. The progress of schools causing concern is regularly monitored by senior officers and there are termly reports to the executive cabinet lead member and the chair of the scrutiny board. There are sensible strategies for reducing LEA support as schools improve. One school that has very recently been successfully removed from special measures had, however, been in that category for three years. This was far too long.

Support for literacy and numeracy

69. The previous inspection judged the LEA's support to schools for raising standards in literacy and numeracy to be good. The LEA's own evaluation of these areas, in the case of literacy backed up by external evaluation from a local university, judged that the provision for both areas continued to be good. The school survey showed that schools continue to value highly the support that they receive. OFSTED's own monitoring of support for the national strategies in both areas suggested that, following restructuring of the LEA's teams and changes in associated advisory support, the LEA was again making sufficient progress. As a result, this aspect of the LEA's work was not subject to detailed inspection.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

70. The LEA's support for ICT was heavily criticised in the previous inspection report. Support for ICT in the curriculum was judged to be very poor, and support for ICT in school administration and electronic exchange of information was poor. The inspection made four recommendations that the LEA: develop detailed strategic plans for the implementation of ICT policies; provide additional advisory support; place more emphasis on support for the use of ICT across the curriculum; and reconsider the provision of technical support.

71. The LEA has made good progress in addressing these recommendations. Support for all aspects of ICT is now sound and has good capacity to improve further. Central to that improvement has been the change in the contractor delivering the maintenance contract, the restructuring of ICT support services, the development of a clear ICT strategy, and the introduction of an innovative single central education management system database for the majority of the LEA's functions. The council has an impressive website, systems for electronic exchange of data are now more effective, and all schools and pupils have web-based e-mail accounts. The council is now on track to meet the government's targets for 2005.

72. A clear framework for the implementation of the LEA and council ICT strategy has been established through a new ICT strategy group. A well structured three-year plan and detailed plans for 2001-02 are now in place. The strategy sets a clear vision for ICT in the city, drawing together the delivery of ICT in schools and its use as a tool for teaching and learning, the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), EAZ and EiC programmes (including city learning centres), the South Yorkshire e-learning

project, and the regional broadband consortium. These plans have straightforward success criteria and realistic targets. There has been appropriate consultation on these developments and they are well supported by schools.

73. Funds have been identified to provide every primary and special school in the city with an interactive whiteboard. Advisory support for ICT has been increased significantly and there has been a much enhanced programme of support and training, some of it based on the five day model used for the literacy strategy. Effective planning linking NGfL and EiC strategies and resources has helped to ensure that NGfL targets have been met. As a result the target ratio for pupils per computer will be achieved in secondary schools. The target ratio in primary schools is, however, less likely to be achieved. Ninety one per cent of schools have taken up New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training and 30 per cent of teachers have so far completed that training. However, the LEA does not yet have the information needed to ensure that it is on target for the majority of schools to have benefited from this opportunity by March 2003.

74. The LEA has begun to analyse pupils' capability in ICT more effectively, largely through an analysis of OFSTED inspection reports. This analysis shows a small but consistent improvement, though the proportion of pupils achieving a GCSE grade A*-C is still only half the nationally figure. The LEA's collection and analysis of information on the performance of schools in ICT is not yet sufficiently developed, and performance indicators have not been sufficiently sharp, to allow progress to be evaluated effectively.

75. The external maintenance contract and new arrangements for technical support are at an early stage, but arrangements for the new contract, the proposed service level agreement, and the proposed monitoring arrangements are all good. The survey of schools conducted as part of this inspection showed lingering dissatisfaction with the service provided. Schools rated support as better than at the last inspection but still less than satisfactory and, in the case of administrative support, in the bottom 25 per cent of all LEAs. However, a survey of ICT co-ordinators, school administrative staff and other users conducted in December 2001 showed satisfaction levels with the new arrangements running at around 90 per cent, demonstrating the pace at which the LEA is working to improve matters.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for ICT:

- performance indicators for progress and attainment in ICT should be further refined to enable progress to be monitored and support more precisely targeted.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

76. The LEA is providing satisfactory support to raise standards at Key Stage 3. Its strategy, and aspects of its implementation, have a number of strengths.

77. The LEA's strategy incorporates the national Key Stage 3 strategy and builds effectively on previous LEA initiatives, including projects to improve Key Stage 3

literacy and on transition between primary and secondary education. The Key Stage 3 literacy project began in 1998 and has had a discernible impact on standards. In 2001, attainment in English in Year 9 rose faster than the national average and the LEA's data indicate that aggregated schools' targets for English, mathematics and science in 2003 are close to the enhanced targets set as part of its LPSA. There remains a shortfall in English but the LEA is confident that, on the basis of recent improvements, its targets will be met.

78. The LEA has used LPSA funding well to supplement the number of consultants provided through national funding and to enhance the strategy team. As a result, it has been able to introduce support for science a year earlier than the national programme. The LEA has used audit data, and evidence from its wider monitoring of schools, to identify and target those schools requiring particular support. The strategy effectively focuses on providing support to schools in developing a cross-curricular perspective on teaching and learning, again building on this key element of its earlier literacy project.

79. The strategy plan 2001-02 is based on a comprehensive audit of performance and sets out clearly the role and responsibility of the LEA in taking forward the strategy. It provides a very clear operational plan for action by the LEA and schools. The strategy is well integrated with the LEA's main priorities and strategy for school improvement. All institutions providing education for secondary age pupils are involved.

80. Early evaluations of training and the LEA's support indicate a high level of satisfaction on the part of teachers. Consultants, and their line managers, are judged to be providing effective support. Monitoring and evaluation of progress against the operational plan and impact on performance are regular, rigorous and based on improving analysis of the data available. Consultants are monitoring provision and progress in individual schools but, as the strategy team acknowledges, reports have not been sufficiently evaluative. Training by the advisory and inspection service is programmed to address this.

81. Slippage in the implementation of the LEA's City Assessment Framework has, however, adversely affected the pace of the Key Stage 3 strategy's work on improving the consistency of assessment, pupil tracking and target setting. The LEA has, sensibly, adopted a much reduced sampling approach in each school to enable the strategy to monitor progress and performance.

Support for ethnic minority groups including Travellers

82. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's strategy for raising the achievement of ethnic minority children was unsatisfactory. The LEA did not have complete data on ethnic minority pupil attainment. What data did exist showed serious underachievement by children of Pakistani, African and Caribbean heritage. Guidance to schools on the deployment of advisory staff and monitoring was urgently required. The report recommended that the LEA should work with headteachers to devise procedures for the deployment and monitoring of staff funded under the ethnic minority achievement grant.

83. The LEA has made good progress in improving its support for children from ethnic minorities, including Traveller children. Its support is now satisfactory, has a number of strengths, and has the capacity to improve further. The ethnic minority achievement grant funding has been delegated to schools using criteria which schools helped to create and that closely reflect need. The use of this grant funding is monitored and links to school improvement are well established. The LEA has up-to-date policies on equal opportunities and racial harassment that are well understood and used in schools, and there are effective monitoring and evaluation strategies in place.

84. The LEA is using the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) standards and actively promotes their use in schools. In-service support and training have helped to raise the expertise of mainstream teachers in promoting equal opportunities and improving race relations. There are particularly good examples of liaison work with local communities to address identified problems, for example, underachievement by Pakistani heritage boys at Key Stage 2.

85. The LEA is now collecting comprehensive data and analyses the attainment of ethnic minority children by ethnic origin and gender at each of the four statutory key stages. It also analyses attendance and exclusion rates for ethnic minority heritage children. This data is used to identify areas where additional support is needed. Challenging targets are set for ethnic minority heritage pupils and there is evidence that this has been effective in raising attainment, for example in the attainment of black Caribbean boys at Key Stage 2. If the results of children of refugees and asylum seekers who have recently arrived in the country with little or no knowledge of English are removed, results in 2001 results show improvements across all four key stages. However, all pupil groups fell short of the targets set.

86. The work of the Traveller education service (TES) is effectively integrated into the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Overall, the service is satisfactorily managed and provides sound value for money. There are well established links with a range of agencies including health, social services and other departments of the council. The TES is properly located within the reorganised access and inclusion service, providing good opportunities for joint service delivery. The LEA's proposal, emerging from its Best Value review, to link the TES with those services focusing on access rather than SEN, is sensible.

87. For the most part, the service enjoys positive relationships with its schools and maintains the trust of the Traveller families. Support in schools has an important focus on raising attainment in key skills, particularly literacy. Work in the primary phase, for example, in the development of texts and materials with Traveller themes for use in the daily literacy hour, has had positive impact. In the secondary phase, pilot initiatives such as the "Cellar Project" have begun to address the problem of non-attending pupils. The service has developed a good range of resources to support schools, including a web site, and provides valuable in-service sessions on race equality and Traveller families. However, given the LEA's drive to raise standards further, the service plan and support agreements with individual schools do not set specific enough performance indicators to allow full evaluation of pupil progress and achievement.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for Traveller children:

- performance indicators for the progress and the attainment of these children should be refined to enable progress to be monitored, and support precisely targeted.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

88. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is good and has the capacity to improve further. Current provision is substantially linked to EiC, but builds effectively on earlier policy and practice in the LEA. Policies and structures are well embedded in secondary schools, and a pilot project with 11 schools has now been extended to all EiC primary schools. Non-EiC primary schools have access to training and materials and some are involved in related EAZ projects. Since September 2001, the LEA has been working in partnership with Rotherham LEA in supporting post-16 gifted and talented students through Excellence Challenge.

89. There is a clear and transparent strategy for funding and implementing EiC work with gifted and talented pupils, resulting in some innovative practice in schools. The LEA has provided excellent guidance and a clear and comprehensive booklet summarises what schools are expected to provide. Guidance on the selection of gifted and talented pupils is aligned with national guidance and ensures an appropriate balance of pupils reflecting each school's population. Good practice is effectively disseminated through meetings, publications and a dedicated web-site, and is complemented by quality training for co-ordinators.

90. The range of activities for gifted and talented pupils led or brokered by the LEA is impressive. Pupils' personal and social skills are developed as well as their academic, creative or physical abilities. Specific programmes have been planned for underachieving groups of boys and ethnic minority pupils. There is a clear emphasis on raising aspirations, particularly in the partnership with Sheffield Hallam University promoting access to higher education. Summer schools have recruited well and have expanded in number. These have been managed effectively by the LEA, with a clear focus on tracking pupils' progress following transition to secondary schools.

91. The LEA's support for gifted and talented pupils is well led and highly regarded by schools for its practical and pragmatic approach. The support given to schools on target setting is improving. Monitoring is effective, and has been used to challenge schools' progress. Progress against targets has been patchy, but there has been a discernible increase in the percentage of pupils gaining 5 GCSE A*-C grades and the number of A*/A grades. A focused project for gifted and talented pupils in the nine lowest achieving secondary schools made a significant contribution to this improvement.

Support for school management

92. Support in this area was sound at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's own evaluation indicated that it remained satisfactory. As a result, no detailed inspection work was conducted. However, evidence from the inspection of other areas demonstrates satisfactory progress in support for school management. There are now a number of strengths, for example, in the LEA's support for school self-evaluation and performance review, and in its programmes for the professional development of headteachers and senior managers.

Support for governors

93. The LEA's support for school governors was judged to be very effective by the previous inspection. The LEA's own evaluation of its work in this area judged support to be good. This was confirmed by schools. As a result, no detailed inspection work was undertaken in this area.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

94. Services that support school management are satisfactory overall, and there are some significant strengths in individual services. Well documented plans are in place which have the potential to improve the LEA's service to its schools further.

95. The current Sheffield traded services booklet 'Supporting You', produced following good consultation with a representative school services board, offers services on a one year basis. Service specifications and service standards are clear, as are complaints procedures. However, it was published late and provides only minimal options over and above the basic service. No full brokerage information has been provided to schools. The publication of a separate document on centrally held, non-delegated LEA services has been delayed. As a result, schools have no real opportunity to gauge whether services offer value for money. However, following the receipt of a consultancy report, the council has agreed a revised approach for 2002-03 for offering services to schools which will introduce major improvements. The programme, to be completed by 2003-04 will establish a broad federation of LEA services working under a single brand identity, establish brokerage arrangements, and appoint a business development manager.

96. **Financial services** were judged to be very effective in the last inspection. The position remains much as it was. The service continues to be well regarded by schools and they judged it to have improved. Almost all schools buy back the traded financial service. In line with a recommendation from the last report, procedures for informing schools of their budgets have been sharpened. The publication of a good set of school financial comparisons for 1999-00 has improved the quality of the benchmarking information available. In 2001, the financial service received a favourable report, as part of an external audit study of school funding and resource management. Appropriate action is being taken on recommendations in that report that the LEA should improve advice to schools on links between development and resource planning in school budgets, and monitor school balances more closely.

97. The LEA's support for **human resources** was assessed as very good in the last report. Evidence from the school survey indicates that the service continues to provide high standards. Almost all schools buy back the traded element of the service. No detailed inspection work was carried out.

98. The last inspection judged the work of **property services** to be poor. There have been significant developments in the service and support is now satisfactory. The process of change began with a relaunch of the premises service in 2001. This, together with the publication of 'Premises Handbook', training programmes for schools and the opening of a premises helpline in 2002, has resulted in an improved service for schools. Technical support is available together with advice about the use of LEA approved contractors. The LEA has begun to link closely together all aspects of its premises and planning work. Schools acknowledge some improvement since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the majority of schools remain critical of provision and are still sceptical that the service can redress the backlog of problems that the LEA and schools have to manage as a result of limited spending on property in the past.

99. Services for **cleaning** and **grounds maintenance** are satisfactory. Both are outsourced to private contractors. In the school survey both were regarded as slightly less than satisfactory though marginally better than at the time of the last inspection. About a third of schools are part of a cleaning contract that was awarded to a private contractor just before the survey. After initial teething problems the quality is now much improved. Schools have been free to choose their preferred grounds maintenance contractor for some years. At present, apart from a client function which is part of the cleaning contract, the LEA has minimal involvement with the quality of provision, though it rightly has plans to disseminate to all schools examples of good practice by the contractor identified by individual schools.

100. The previous inspection judged the LEA provision for **catering services** to be satisfactory. The LEA judges that it remains so. Eighty eight per cent of schools have bought back into the central contract awarded to a private contractor in 2001. The school survey indicates general satisfaction. No detailed inspection work was undertaken.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

101. The LEA is implementing a good range of strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers. This builds well on effective existing support for the continuing professional development of staff, including newly qualified teachers and senior managers in schools, and on the LEA's substantial links with regional and national training providers. Its strategies are well integrated into its overall strategy for school improvement and form a priority in its EDP for 2002-07. Schools feel the LEA's support for managers has improved since the last inspection: two thirds of primary schools and over half the secondary schools rating it as good.

102. The LEA has made full use of national initiatives and Teacher Training Agency (TTA) funding to address problems of recruitment and retention. A recruitment strategy manager was appointed in 1999 and a further successful bid to the TTA has

extended funding for a further year. Other initiatives include the establishment of a teacher supply agency, and the appointment of two seconded headteachers to support the recruitment strategy manager, and to work on the development of the "Sheffield Guarantee". This particularly innovative and potentially very effective strategy, constructed in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and the South Yorkshire Leadership Centre, is to be launched in September 2002. It gives an entitlement to professional development for all teachers. The programme is well structured, addressing all key levels of career development and with good progression in all stages, particularly through middle and senior management.

103. The in-house teacher supply agency has operated successfully since September 2001. It is self-financing and was established in partnership with and managed by schools. TTA funded 'Taster Returner' courses were successfully introduced in 2001. The LEA's strategy recognises the particular problems of schools in challenging circumstances and has set demanding targets to tackle and reduce them, including partnership with the EAZs to improve staff recruitment.

104. These initiatives are already having an impact both in recruiting staff and retaining them. The number of unfilled vacancies is well below that nationally and in similar LEAs, and the retention rate in 2001 (92.85 per cent) was high. The number of newly qualified teachers appointed has remained constant and the number retained has almost doubled.

The effectiveness of leadership of services to support school improvement (in particular advisory and inspection services)

105. In the last inspection, the effectiveness of leadership of the services to support school improvement was reported as generally satisfactory. The LEA's own evaluation and the views of schools indicated that this remains the case and, as a result, no detailed inspection work was conducted. However, sufficient evidence emerged during the inspection to illustrate that there has been at least satisfactory improvement in the effectiveness of these services, and in some respects significant improvement.

106. Overall, these services are now effectively led, and are particularly effective in their strategic planning and performance management. Most significantly, the work of the advisory and inspection service and pupil support services in supporting improvement is now planned together and jointly monitored by senior and service managers. Service planning is good and is well linked to the overall priorities of the LEA. Targets are set for individuals and services that ensure progress towards these priorities can be effectively monitored. Performance review and planning processes are well managed and include effective procedures for appraisal and are well supported by professional development both within, and across services.

Excellence in Cities (EiC)

107. The LEA has made good progress in implementing the EiC initiative in partnership with its schools. EiC is now integral to the LEA's strategies for raising attainment and promoting social inclusion. The deployment of EiC co-ordinator posts within relevant education services is helping to ensure good collaborative working

and coherence of planning and delivery of these strategies. The initiative is well led and effectively managed. Initiatives are well planned, the quality of training provided to schools is good, and good practice disseminated very effectively.

108. The LEA has taken a strong lead in developing partnership working at all levels and across all strands of the initiative. This has been brought about through genuine consultation to agree and align priorities and activities, and collaborative working, for example, in joint training for learning mentors and education welfare officers. Resources and support are allocated on the basis of criteria agreed with schools, are well aligned to priorities and sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of individual schools. Regular monitoring is used effectively to challenge progress against agreed targets and to inform planning. However, data is not always analysed in sufficient detail to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the allocation of resources in all aspects of EiC.

109. EiC programmes for gifted and talented pupils and the work of learning mentors have contributed to improvements in attainment at GCSE. The attendance of some targeted groups has improved and the rate of fixed term exclusions has decreased in schools with learning support units. Headteachers interviewed were unanimous that EiC has had a significant impact on their schools, not least on pupils' motivation and personal development, as well as on the quality of provision. However, there has been little discernible improvement in overall attendance and on the rate of exclusions since the start of EiC.

Recommendation

In order to improve EiC:

- performance measures should be used more critically to allow the LEA, schools and the Partnership Board to evaluate the impact of all strands of activity, to judge the impact of resource allocation, and inform deployment.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Summary

110. The LEA has recently made considerable progress in developing its strategy and provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). There had been a history of continuous review of SEN provision, instability in staffing amongst senior officers and few observable results. Now, however, under new, clear-sighted leadership, this area of work is being reformed with energy and commitment. SEN and inclusion issues are woven throughout the EDP and are beginning to contribute towards school improvement. Changes to service delivery have not yet had time to have their full impact.

The LEA's strategy for SEN

111. In the last inspection report, the LEA's strategy for SEN was described as unsatisfactory. Progress had been too slow. The report made four recommendations to improve the strategic planning of SEN. The LEA has made good progress in addressing most of these recommendations, though the future role of special schools requires further clarification. Support for pupils with SEN is now satisfactory and the LEA has significant capacity for further improvement.

112. The LEA has drawn up, and consulted on an effective strategic plan, including a new draft policy for SEN. The plan has the potential to make significant improvements to the LEA's provision for children with SEN. The policy and strategy are underpinned by a commitment to more inclusive education for children and are based on a comprehensive review and analysis of need. The development of the strategic plan has been divided into four phases and the third, the detailed action planning stage, has only just begun. The plan is widely supported by schools and other stakeholders but, given slow progress in the past, they remain concerned that it is now implemented as speedily as possible.

113. Members and officers are strong advocates for the rights of pupils with SEN and senior officers provide good leadership in implementing necessary change. Planning for SEN is well integrated with other corporate plans, for example the EDP and the Children's Service Plan. The new draft SEN policy is well in line with national guidelines for the Code of Practice for special educational needs. Planning at a strategic level with social services is good, and with health is sound. Nevertheless, schools are still critical of these services at the point of delivery, and inter-agency cooperation with health is still impacting on the LEA's performance in complying with statutory obligations.

114. An audit system for the delegation of funds for pupils with high incidence special educational needs was introduced in secondary schools three years ago and is being implemented in primary schools this year. It has been well managed and has begun to rectify some of the previous inconsistencies in the allocation of SEN funding identified in the last report. Interviews indicate that schools value this change and the greater flexibility it will provide, and the increased opportunities for early intervention and greater support to pupils with SEN.

115. Initiatives to involve head teachers and special needs co-ordinators in the moderation of submissions for statutory assessment, and the funding allocation through an audit approach, are good. Systems are transparent and fair. Criteria used for statutory assessment are consistent with the revised Code of Practice. The LEA, having devolved funding for children with high incidence statements, i.e. learning, behaviour and specific learning difficulties, is starting to cease statements for these pupils in mainstream schools. The LEA fully recognises the need to ensure that children's needs continue to be met in full.

116. Within the strategy, plans to reduce and rationalise the number of special schools are appropriate and satisfactorily address the recommendation in the last report. However, they lack detail in terms of their future role as specialist centres of excellence serving mainstream schools and in how the services they offer will fit with existing support services.

117. There are well defined opportunities for parents to have contact with the LEA during the statutory assessment process and parents are provided with a range of helpful information leaflets. The LEA operates a successful parent partnership service and is largely effective in resolving disputes. The number of cases requiring the intervention of the SEN tribunal is very low.

Recommendation

In order to ensure the SEN strategy is implemented effectively and to timescales set:

- the relationships and links between mainstream and special schools should be clarified in order to support more inclusive practice.

Statutory obligations

118. The LEA is now taking very effective steps to fulfil its statutory duties. The last report recommended that the LEA should work with schools to improve the drafting and use of individual education plans. The authority has improved the monitoring of annual reviews, providing useful feedback and training to schools on their quality and individual education plans submitted. There have been significant improvements in the timeliness of annual reviews. Data collection and analysis have improved to take account of additional aspects such as ethnicity.

119. The number of children with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with statistical neighbours and the national rate, and is beginning to reduce. Assessment and the issue of statements are well managed. Ninety-five per cent of statutory assessments (when exceptions are taken into account) are prepared within the time limits set by national guidelines. This is well above the national average. However, without exceptions, this falls to 48 per cent. This is only a slight improvement on the position at the time of last inspection when 40 per cent of statements were delayed for the same reason and is well below the LEA's target. The majority of delays continue to be because of the lateness of medical advice from the health authority. The LEA has done all that could reasonably be expected to

address this weakness and the appointment of a consultant by the health authority should improve this aspect of interagency co-operation.

School improvement

120. Evidence from the last inspection showed that the work of support services was generally satisfactory. Evidence from the school survey and interviews with head teachers and special needs co-ordinators indicate that this is still generally the case, though services to meet the needs of pupils with sensory impairments are now judged to be good. The LEA is proposing to provide advice and support to meet the needs of pupils with more generic learning and behavioural difficulties on an area basis, co-ordinated with health and social services, and more directly accountable to local users. This is a promising initiative but has yet to be comprehensively implemented.

121. The last inspection found that school staff were offered a good range of training including externally accredited courses and that special educational needs co-ordinators benefited from regular cluster meetings. This situation has been maintained. The LEA is sensibly re-deploying resources in a more proactive way to support schools. As a result of a decrease in requests for statutory assessment educational psychologists are now able to focus more of their time working with schools on whole school approaches. This is in line with the LEA's inclusion strategy. The recently updated SEN handbook is a useful tool for schools. A well conceived self-review framework for schools, developed with the advisory and inspection service is now in place and has the potential to support schools in evaluating their SEN provision and to aid the LEA in monitoring and targeting poor practice.

122. OFSTED inspection data, however, indicates weaknesses in provision for pupils with SEN in Key Stages 3 and 4. Plans are insufficiently targeted to address issues at these key stages.

Recommendation

In order to improve SEN support for school improvement:

- data on the impact of SEN support needs to be analysed more rigorously and used to focus the work of the LEA on those schools requiring the most improvement and those types of special educational need requiring most support.

Value for money

123. Sheffield's total budget for SEN, including centrally held and delegated funds, is higher than the average for statistical neighbours and metropolitan LEAs, and has grown significantly over the last few years. Its central spending is particularly high in respect of support for pupils with SEN, including the educational psychology service. There are early signs that a reduction in the number of statements issued is providing flexibility within the allocation of resources. Procedures for monitoring and controlling the central budget are much improved and, other than transport, the LEA has succeeded in balancing the SEN budget in 2000-01.

124. The Best Value review conducted in 2000 has resulted in services being more closely aligned to the needs of schools and led to clear service improvement. Plans are now in place for the devolution to schools of support services. This in line with the inclusion strategy of the LEA and more detail is provided in Appendix 2.

125. The LEA has procedures in place for monitoring delegated expenditure but recognises that these are not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that schools are making the best use of funds. Funding has been made available for schools to audit their inclusive practice through use of the DfES Index for Inclusion. However the LEA is not yet able to demonstrate accurately the impact of its services on raising attainment for children with special educational needs. Overall, therefore, the LEA is not yet in a position to assess whether its support for SEN provides satisfactory value for money.

Recommendation

In order to improve the value for money in SEN provision:

- each element for SEN within schools' budgets should be clearly defined, and the LEA's expectations and arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the impact of this expenditure clarified

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The strategy to promote social inclusion

126. The LEA's effectiveness in promoting social inclusion was judged to be poor at the time of the last inspection. It has taken firm action and committed significant resources to meet the task of turning around weaknesses in many aspects of provision. The leadership of pupil support services has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. The LEA's overall support for social inclusion is now sound and has a number of significant strengths.

127. The local authority demonstrates a strong commitment to social inclusion through its corporate and strategic planning. This is reflected in the planning and delivery of provision, including the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Multi - agency and multi-disciplinary working between education and other services actively promotes this objective. Education plays a prominent role in social inclusion and regeneration projects and city-wide partnerships and initiatives such as New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, the development of a Family Support strategy and the newly established partnership for Children and Young people.

128. The LEA's access and inclusion strategy is at varying stages of implementation. This reflects the need to prioritise the significant reorganisation to services and quality of support that was required. It also reflects the shift in emphasis in the deployment of services, from support and intervention for individual pupils to helping schools become better at the strategic management of inclusion. . The LEA has made satisfactory progress in ensuring equality of access for all pupils, including those with SEN and from differing communities, and in its support to improve attendance. There have been significant improvements to its support for children in public care. However, its provision for excluded pupils and for behaviour support has not yet improved sufficiently and remains unsatisfactory. The LEA now has the potential to provide far more effective support to schools and to its most vulnerable pupils. However, it is too soon to measure impact, schools have yet to see many of the benefits, and the LEA has yet to develop robust systems for evaluating the value for money that its support for inclusion, and services, now provide.

The supply of school places

129. The LEA is good at managing the supply of school places. It has continued to make progress since the last inspection when it was judged to be doing well, and schools' rate it in the top 25 per cent of LEAs.

130. Surplus places in primary schools currently stand at 10 per cent, and 20 primary schools have over 25 per cent of surplus places. However, action is planned and agreed which will reduce surplus places to eight per cent. No secondary school has over 25 per cent of surplus places and, overall, in that sector surplus places currently amount to four per cent. However, current activity to re-organise special schools and review under fives provision in maintained nursery schools should have taken place earlier.

131. Following good consultation with secondary schools, a well produced plan has been agreed to manage the peak in admissions over the next few years. An innovative multi-disciplinary primary regeneration project rationalises school premises whilst promoting improvements in educational provision for the community. The School Organisation Plan is thorough, clearly presented and links well with other plans and the school improvement strategy. It is underpinned by good forecasting information and supplemented by a helpful pack of more detailed planning and admissions data for each school. The School Organisation Committee functions well and the infant class size plan has been introduced effectively.

Asset management

132. In the last inspection, property management was assessed as unsatisfactory and the overall condition of school buildings in Sheffield as poor. A history of under-investment in school buildings had led to a backlog of replacement and repairs that could not be met from existing budgets. The report made three recommendations: to review the provision made by the direct service organisation; provide accurate costs in the asset management plan; and increase budgetary provision for building maintenance and improvement. Significant progress has been made and all three recommendations have been appropriately addressed. The LEA's planning for asset management is very satisfactory and has a number of strengths. Systems are in place which should ensure further improvement.

133. A combined education planning and premises team has been established, providing a good integrated structure to address building issues. Investment has increased, partly through the New Deal programme, and partly as a result of the council's own initiatives. Over the last five years, £12.3m has been invested from capital receipts and reserves. Central and delegated revenue expenditure on repairs and maintenance has increased to an annual £4.5m. Total capital expenditure, including a successful and innovative PFI bid, was in excess of £43m in both 2000-01 and 2001-02. Major rebuilding or remodelling projects have been completed at 24 schools over the last four years. Six new schools have opened under the PFI and two more are in procurement. The increased levels of investment will promote significant improvement in the quality of school buildings.

134. Sheffield has recovered from a disappointing start to the asset management planning (AMP) process, when its condition data was considered to be unsatisfactory by the DfES. Suitability surveys have been completed and condition data re-assessed and the AMP is now satisfactory, with some good features. Consultation with representatives of schools has been sound. There is a regular, targeted, and recorded programme of school visits by premises officers to facilitate joint school/LEA planning for school premises improvement. Links with the overall school improvement strategy are good.

135. Sheffield has recently prepared a report on a long-term capital strategy to improve school buildings, as part of a project being undertaken with the DfES. The analysis and identification of the issues is good. Nevertheless, substantial additional external funding and support will be needed to produce good quality premises in all Sheffield schools.

Admissions

136. The last inspection considered that the LEA performed its functions for school admissions very effectively. Although procedures for admissions have not been subject to detailed inspection, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that support for admissions remains good. Schools' views generally confirm this judgement.

137. Sheffield's system for admission to schools is based on well-established catchment areas, with comparatively little movement between Sheffield and neighbouring LEAs. Information provided for parents is clear and conforms to the admissions code of practice. Over the last few years, an average of 98 per cent of preferences for primary admissions have been met and 94 per cent for secondary admissions. The timetable for admission appeals allows for hearings to be conducted in good time before the beginning of the academic year. There is effective co-ordination with other relevant admissions authorities. Consultation procedures with a representative body for Sheffield schools are well established and the Admissions Forum works well.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

138. The last inspection was critical of the strategy for provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS) and the slow rate of progress in establishing a more coherent and co-ordinated approach, judging both to be poor. It recommended that the LEA should focus on reducing exclusion and assisting reintegration of pupils to school, and should clarify schools' responsibilities for monitoring the progress of pupils who are on the roll of a school and attend education outside school. The LEA has addressed both these issues. Nevertheless, despite improvements in both strategy and delivery of services, provision for EOTAS remains unsatisfactory. The school survey indicates that, whilst secondary schools now feel well supported, primary and special schools rate EOTAS support in the bottom 25 per cent of schools of all LEAs.

139. The LEA's systems for referral of excluded pupils are effective and well understood by schools. Where pupils are excluded, they are registered with the teaching and reintegration service, normally within the 15 days set out in national guidance. Officers have recently developed a helpful voluntary code of practice, in consultation with headteachers and the admissions forum, clarifying re-integration procedures and specifying the support available from the LEA. However, too many of the pupils who have been permanently excluded from school have been without a school place for longer than a year. Progress on improving the rate of re-integration to mainstream school has been slow. Only 30 per cent of those excluded last year returned to mainstream schools, less than half the service's target. Average attendance is well below the LEA average.

140. There is strong commitment from lead officers and elected members to meet the requirements for full time (25 hours) provision in September 2002. However, there are no realistic costed plans in place. Only 41 per cent of pupils receive between 10 and 20 hours of provision a week and 30 per cent per cent of pupils receive fewer than 10 hours a week. The staffing of the reorganised teaching and

reintegration service doubled last year to 35 full time equivalent staff for September 2001 but, even with this increase, the service is unlikely to meet even its interim target of providing 25 hours a week for 70 per cent of pupils by March.

141. The LEA is rightly aiming to delegate maximum funding to schools. As part of the re-organisation of the teaching and reintegration service (TRS), an additional £300,000 was made available to secondary schools in 2000-01 to support behaviour management and help prevent exclusions. However, systems for monitoring are not yet sufficiently well developed for the LEA to know whether this and other initiatives are having an impact. There are plans to integrate support for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion, through the development of more local area provision, more closely involving head teachers in decisions about deployment of resources. This has been welcomed by mainstream and special schools.

142. All pupils have individual targets and those in Key Stage 4 have opportunities to obtain a range of external accreditation. The service holds data on individual pupils but has yet to develop proper mechanisms for monitoring the overall progress and attendance of pupils educated out of school. This is being addressed through the development of an improved database that will be in place before the end of the school year.

143. The LEA is able to track all known pupils without a school place and has suitable multi-agency links to enable identification of children who move into the area. There are a number of good examples of liaison with other services, such as high quality provision for 14 excluded pupils made through the youth service. The teaching and reintegration service has a link adviser from the advisory and inspection service and access to senior education welfare officers and the rapid response team for attendance. Liaison with social services with regard to children in public care and with the youth offending team is effective. The LEA makes appropriate special provision for schoolgirl mothers.

144. The quality of provision for children educated at home is monitored effectively through home visits by an education welfare officer, and parents are provided with helpful guidance. Children who are sick or in hospital receive individual tuition from the TRS and study support from their schools. Each receives a minimum of five and a half hours direct teaching a week. There is an appropriate and strong emphasis on maintaining links with schools. Nevertheless, officers are unable to show through their monitoring exactly how much overall provision is made.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for Education Otherwise than at School:

- detailed costed plans should be urgently drawn up, showing the additional amount and range of provision needed to meet the requirements for full time provision from September 2002;
- the EOTAS database should be used to produce reports on attainment and attendance which will inform service evaluation and future planning; and
- monitoring should be improved to ensure that delegated funding is used effectively by schools to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions.

Attendance

145. The LEA's support for attendance was described in the last report as poor. There were significant weaknesses in the strategy for attendance. Schools were not always aware of their allocation of education welfare officer support, there was no service level agreement, and the responsibilities of schools and the education social work service lacked clarity. There were also inconsistencies in the work of the education welfare officers and legal powers were not always used effectively.

146. These weaknesses have been addressed and the LEA's provision has improved considerably since the last inspection. It is now satisfactory overall, with a number of strengths. The LEA has recently consulted schools on a comprehensive new strategy for improving attendance, which takes account of other strategies for improving inclusion and raising standards. Excellent guidance has been produced, which covers the statutory responsibilities of schools and provides exemplars of good practice from schools within the city. A service level agreement has been devised which sets out clearly the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and the LEA.

147. All schools have set attendance targets and the LEA has provided them with benchmarked data for the first time. Schools are now required to produce an attendance plan, which details their approaches to meeting their attendance targets. This plan is used to challenge schools' approaches to improving attendance. The approach is well integrated with the performance review of schools conducted by the SAIS and ensures that support is allocated according to need. The LEA has worked closely with the police. A multi-agency task force has been established led by a seconded senior police officer. There have been regular truancy sweeps within the city, and an absence pass scheme has been taken up by almost all secondary and half the primary schools.

148. A substantial reorganisation of the education support and welfare service has taken place. This has the potential to improve the coherence and consistency of support to schools. The service has been combined with the pupil inclusion team to form an integrated attendance and inclusion service, organised on an area support basis alongside other services supporting schools. The service is well led and systems are being put in place which have the potential to improve the accountability and consistency of officers' work with schools. The deployment of support is well conceived. It now provides schools with strategic support, rapid response and project support and is well linked to the work of personal advisers in schools employed by the Connexions service. Schools have been well consulted on the new arrangement and are strongly in favour of them. This is an improving service and the recently introduced strategy provides considerable potential for further improvement.

149. The new proposals for improving attendance have not been in place long enough for their impact to have made a significant difference to the attendance figures in schools. Attendance in primary and secondary schools remains well below similar LEAs and LEAs nationally, though the gap between Sheffield and other LEAs,

which had been widening, was reduced in 2000-01. The LEA's own analysis indicates that the targets set in the EDP were unrealistic and will not be met. New targets have been set which remain challenging but are realistic and are based on better data.

Behaviour support

150. The previous OFSTED report identified weaknesses in the LEA's strategy for improving behaviour and reducing exclusions, and judged it to be unsatisfactory. The behaviour support plan (BSP) was inadequate. Support for behaviour management has improved, but weaknesses remain and the LEA's support is still unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, recent developments mean that the LEA has considerable potential for further improvement.

151. The overall rate of permanent exclusions 1999-00 was broadly in line with that nationally and had reduced slightly in the primary sector. Permanent exclusions in secondary schools have reduced very slightly in 2000-01, but those in primary and special schools have increased. The rate of exclusion of pupils with SEN is a cause for concern. Exclusions from special schools are high and half the pupils on the roll of the teaching and reintegration service are identified as having significant special educational needs, many meeting the needs for statutory assessment. There is emerging evidence of a decrease in the rate of fixed term exclusions in some secondary schools with learning support units funded through EiC. Overall, however, fixed term exclusions are increasing faster than in other LEAs and have significantly exceeded targets set out in the BSP.

152. The BSP has been revised in consultation with the DfES and external consultants and is now generally satisfactory. It sets out targets for reducing exclusion and improving attendance and refers to the work of other agencies and initiatives such as EiC. However, it is largely descriptive and the many initiatives are not sufficiently well linked together to provide a co-ordinated strategy. Performance indicators in plans are insufficiently outcome based and their impact is therefore difficult to measure. For example, it is unclear what improvements the LEA is expecting where schools have received additional funding for learning mentors and learning support units. The LEA is aware of these weaknesses and has plans for additions to the BSP which reflect its revised access and inclusion strategy.

153. The revised behaviour strategy is now well co-ordinated with the SEN strategy. The LEA provides guidance to support schools in the use of the pupil retention grant and managing in-school centres. Behaviour support is provided through the specialist teaching and educational psychology service (STEPS). Changes to the deployment of educational psychologists are providing increasing opportunities for them to focus on improving teacher confidence and skills in managing poor behaviour.

154. Plans to move support for behaviour to area teams, alongside support for SEN, health and social services, have the potential to provide far more cohesive and integrated support. Schools welcome this but they are not entirely clear how it will work out in practice. In the school survey, for example, primary schools, were still critical of the level of support for behaviour, rating it in the bottom 25 per cent of all

LEAs. Levels of satisfaction have improved only marginally since the last inspection. Staff and governors in schools have had access to very extensive training opportunities on behaviour management. However, there has been little evaluation of the impact of such training.

155. The collection and analysis of data on behaviour is improving. Both fixed term and permanent exclusions are monitored. The performance review conducted by the advisory and inspection service (AIS) gathers information on the management of behaviour and problems experienced in schools. Information and data on behaviour in schools from OFSTED reports are analysed, but the links between OFSTED's judgements on the climate in Sheffield's primary schools and poor behaviour have not yet been explored in sufficient detail. A school self-review framework is helping schools to analyse areas for development and will be thoroughly embedded by September 2002. Regular meetings take place between the AIS and access and inclusion officers, to identify schools whose management of behaviour is a cause for concern. The service is beginning to move to a more proactive approach.

Recommendations

In order to improve behaviour support:

- guidance should be provided to schools on how the interrelated strands of LEA support fit together and can be accessed;
- the high rate of exclusion from special schools, and the appropriateness of consequent placements for those pupils, should be investigated; and
- targets should be agreed with schools to reduce the number of days lost to fixed term exclusion, and should be differentiated to reflect levels of additional funding and support in schools.

Health & safety, welfare and child protection

156. The last inspection report showed that provision in this area was good. This remains the case. No detailed inspection work was carried out on the LEA's arrangements for health and safety during the course of this inspection, but the arrangements for child protection were reviewed more thoroughly. The LEA continues to provide a good service in support of child protection and has the capacity to improve further. It meets all its statutory duties in this area and has good working relationships with social services. It plays an active role in protecting children from harm and contributes fully to the work of the Area Child Protection Committee. There are agreed procedures for multi-disciplinary training. The list of designated persons in schools is kept up-to-date and all designated persons have received training.

Children in public care

157. The last inspection indicated that provision in this area was generally poor. There were weaknesses in the attainment of children in public care and a dearth of action to tackle this. In addition, there was no shared database between education and social services, in order to inform each directorate of important changes affecting these children. The report made three recommendations concerning the

creation of a shared database and systems for exchanging information, and on producing guidance and training on raising attainment. Good progress has been made on implementing these recommendations. The support for these children is now good and has the capacity to improve further.

158. The council has actively taken responsibility for promoting both the educational attainment and pastoral support of children in its care. Both the children's services plan and the Quality Protects management action plan define a clear and coherent strategy which is being implemented and monitored. Education and social services directorates have agreed procedures for working together and sharing information. Data is collected and analysed on changes in school and care placements, and on exclusion, attendance, attainment and the personal education plans of these children. This information is circulated on a termly basis. A 'Children in Public Care' (CiPC) education panel meets monthly to discuss and resolve any care issues.

159. A CiPC support team has been established, drawn from the education and social services directorates. All schools are asked to designate a teacher with specific responsibilities for children in public care and this list is circulated annually to social workers. Training has been provided for both education and social services staff on raising the attainment of these children. Governor training is planned for 2002. Advice, guidance and access to ICT hardware has been provided to support the teaching and learning of children in public care within residential units.

160. The numbers of children in public care taking end of Key Stage tests and GCSE examinations is small, making statistical comparisons difficult. In 2000 attainment improved significantly at Key Stage 3. There was a slight improvement in the attainment in English at Key Stage 2, but the LEA's target was not achieved. Performance in GCSE examinations was significantly adrift of the targets set. This has been a cause of concern to the LEA, particularly in the light of the PSA target for the number of children in public care achieving 5 or more GCSEs by 2004. The LEA has set new targets for the coming two years and, using PSA funding, has employed a further temporary teacher starting January 2002 to work specifically on raising the attainment of these children.

Measures to combat racism

161. The last report indicated that the effectiveness of measures to combat racism were satisfactory but that the LEA had not, at that time, put measures in place to address the recommendations of the McPherson report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. This has been done and schools now monitor racist incidents. The council has adopted the CRE standards and the LEA is actively promoting these standards in schools. The LEA's own evaluation indicates that provision remains satisfactory and the survey of schools confirmed this view. No detailed inspection work was conducted.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

162. The previous inspection judged corporate leadership, planning and procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans to be a strength of the LEA. The ruling group and senior management team were still relatively new at that time but were providing sound leadership and beginning to tackle some long standing difficulties in education effectively. There were, however, some weaknesses in terms of the openness and effectiveness of decision making, particularly in financial decision making, and the report recommended improvements in service planning and consultation procedures.

163. Members and officers have continued to develop a clear, shared vision, for the social and economic regeneration of the city, with education, and raising educational standards, at the heart of its future development. This is well reflected in corporate priorities. The council has developed a number of innovative strategies to attract funding and to use national initiatives to address long standing problems in educational provision and the regeneration of areas of the city. A clear framework has been established, which ensures that decision making and actions involve all relevant parties, strategic partners and services, across the broad front of social and educational initiatives in which the city is involved. This enables timely decisions to be made.

164. There is a strong, but supportive, culture of accountability within the council. Officers know the framework in which they operate and their contributions to overarching strategies and cross-cutting initiatives. They are well supported by management information and very effective performance management. The LEA has made good progress in implementing the recommendations from the last inspection and strengths reported last time have been built upon. This is now a well run LEA.

Corporate planning

165. The strengths in the clarity, coherence, consistency of corporate planning reported by the last inspection have been consolidated. Corporate plans are well implemented and have targets that are affordable. The corporate planning cycle is effectively linked to financial planning, and these links are being developed further.

166. A common framework and mechanisms for ensuring clear lines of management, accountability and consistent planning are well established and now effectively underpin service planning and performance review within the education directorate. There are clear plans and straightforward procedures for defining the work of departments and services and their contribution to the corporate priorities of the council. Good progress has been made in consolidating cross-service planning at all levels. This is particularly evident in recent effective work in implementing strategic initiatives involving education and other services to support social inclusion.

167. The Corporate Plan 2001-04 provides a clear hub for the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), directorate plans, area action plans and corporate projects. The community plan, to be completed by April 2002, is already accessible

on the council's website. The City Strategy, managed by the local strategic partnership 'Sheffield First', underpins the very clear corporate thrust of social and economic regeneration. It sets out four themes, one of which is education. The LEA is an active manager or lead partner in eight of the twelve development areas, including key initiatives involving New Deal for Communities, Social Regeneration and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund. This has led, for example, to an additional £1.5 million to support nine of the LEA's most disadvantaged schools and six area based family support programmes in deprived neighbourhoods.

168. The LEA has produced a clear matrix which sets out links across the 33 key plans and initiatives currently managed by the council, identifying links with other directorates, management responsibilities, school and other stakeholder involvement and contributions to school improvement. The education directorate plan is clear, pragmatic and well aligned with corporate priorities. Priorities in the plan, and performance indicators, reflect the BVPP and link sensibly to the EDP and the directorate's focus on improved service provision. A one year implementation plan for each priority area includes brief but clear targets and actions related to performance indicators, and identify the specific contributions of each service within the restructured directorate.

169. Other specific education plans are sound overall, and necessary improvements to the strategic 'mapping' of cross service support for school improvement and social inclusion initiatives in the current EDP and BSP should be addressed by revisions that are already in hand.

Leadership of officers and elected members, and decision making

170. Senior officers and elected members provide good leadership. The early strategic direction being provided by members and officers at the time of the previous inspection has been strengthened very effectively. The chief executive's department and senior management team continue to give an effective lead. There are clear procedures for decision making by members and officers. The council has reviewed and amended its decision making and scrutiny procedures following the first year and has made a positive effort to maximise the involvement of members and stakeholders in the decision making process. Briefings and other communications enable backbench members to remain fully in touch with, and contribute to, decisions. Area panels play a significant role in decisions on initiatives with a strong area focus such as Sure Start and EAZs.

171. Members are well informed, individually and collectively. Advice from officers, and briefings and reports on education are sufficiently clear, informative and, where necessary, well argued. This enables members to be effective in carrying out their role in monitoring the performance of services and schools. Scrutiny procedures are used well as a means of driving improvement rather than simply monitoring policy. The delegation of powers is clear and appropriate and allows officers to act, whilst remaining accountable for their actions. Members have been prepared to support, and initiate, some very innovative and radical schemes, particularly in projects combining area regeneration and school reorganisation.

172. The executive director for education provides strong strategic leadership and co-ordinates and manages the work of the education service well, ensuring the delivery of corporate priorities. The decision to restructure the education directorate in order to address a number of weaknesses identified in previous inspection has created a more coherent policy and planning framework, clearer roles for senior staff and services, and made line management and accountability clearer. Recent appointments of high quality senior staff has helped to implement necessary improvements and to consolidate the growing trust of schools in the LEA, and in the quality and effectiveness of the leadership of senior officers, evident at the time of the last inspection.

Partnership

173. The LEA's support for partnership working was judged to be satisfactory in the last report. However, at that time, there was little evidence that the partnerships had a positive impact on schools. The LEA's work with other agencies has continued to improve. Its work with strategic partners, particularly Sheffield First, is excellent. Consultation with strategic partners and other stakeholders, including the community, is strong. The primary regeneration project, for example involves a whole range of partners including two dioceses and a wide range of stakeholders in the local communities where reviews of primary schools are being carried out. In one location, a development trust, a private/public regeneration company, the local community, the health authority and a number of council departments have been brought together to establish a new primary school within a neighbourhood centre that includes health and community facilities. Partnership working is well managed, and the LEA's framework for partnership ensures activities are very effectively related to existing education plans and targets.

174. The LEA has built effective partnership arrangements with regional bodies such as the Learning Skills Council. It is prepared to take a strategic lead in the development of new regional arrangements, for example in combining its youth and careers services within the new Connexions service. There are good links with the standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE) and the LEA fulfils its statutory obligations to this body effectively. There continues to be effective cross-service planning and work with the police, health and social services. Strategic partnership with social services and the health authority have been strengthened, and new arrangements for area based support provide further opportunities for development.

175. Consultation arrangements with schools have improved and are now effective. A new consultation standard has been introduced and schools are now more closely involved in the determination of education policy. EiC is integral to the LEA's development of new patterns of collaborative working and is now the model for joint planning between the LEA and schools. Strategic and operational partnerships between the LEA and EiC and EAZs are strong.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes relatively few recommendations, reflecting the overall progress made by the LEA.

The following recommendations, however, are key to further progress in the LEA. Work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to improve support for EOTAS:

- detailed costed plans should be urgently drawn up, showing the additional amount and range of provision needed to meet the requirements for full time provision from September 2002; and
- the EOTAS database should be used to produce reports on attainment and attendance which will inform service evaluation and future planning; and monitoring should be improved to ensure that delegated funding is used effectively by schools to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions.

In order to improve behaviour support:

- guidance should be provided to schools on how the interrelated strands of LEA support fit together and can be accessed;
- the high rate of exclusion from special schools, and the appropriateness of consequent placements for those pupils, should be investigated; and
- targets should be agreed with schools to reduce the number of days lost to fixed term exclusion, and should be differentiated to reflect levels of additional funding and support in schools.

In order to ensure the SEN strategy is implemented effectively and to timescales set:

- the relationships and links between mainstream and special schools should be clarified in order to support more inclusive practice.

In order to improve value for money in SEN provision:

- each element for SEN within schools' budgets, and the LEA's expectations and arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the impact of this expenditure, should be clarified.

The report also makes the following recommendations, reflecting a common theme on further developing the LEA's use of data, and indicators of performance and progress, to better identify the impact of its strategies and target its resources and support effectively. They are:

In order to improve monitoring of progress of the school improvement strategy and efforts to accelerate progress:

- monitoring reports on the EDP should be sharpened to provide clearer analysis of how strategies and actions may require strengthening or amendment; and

- the school improvement strategy, and associated primary strategy, should demonstrate clearly how the work of services supporting social inclusion, and other initiatives, will be interwoven and targeted to support schools.

In order to improve the LEA's ability to monitor and challenge all schools:

- a framework for setting targets to measure pupil progress in special schools should be agreed with head teachers and training for its implementation be provided.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- performance indicators for progress and attainment in ICT should be further refined to enable progress to be monitored and support more precisely targeted.

In order to improve EiC:

- performance measures should be used more critically to allow the LEA, schools and the Partnership Board to evaluate the impact of all strands of activity, to judge the impact of resource allocation, and inform deployment.

In order to improve SEN support for school improvement:

- data on the impact of SEN support needs to be analysed more rigorously and used to focus the work of the LEA on those schools requiring the most improvement and those types of special educational need requiring most support.

APPENDIX 2:

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SHEFFIELD SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SUPPORT SERVICES

1. The review was wide-ranging and appropriate in scope. It covered the support, teaching and the educational psychology service (STEPS), behaviour support, learning support and the sensory impaired services. Traveller education and children in public care featured marginally as elements of the SEN support services. These were high-risk services, expensive to run and crucial to the delivery of the LEA's emerging strategy for inclusion.

2. The last inspection of the LEA reported that the work of the SEN support services was generally satisfactory. STEPS provided a comprehensive range of support to pupils and its work was judged to be satisfactory, with some strengths. Services for pupils with sensory impairment were consistently effective. Behaviour support was reported to be thinly spread and lacked the flexibility to respond quickly to schools concerns. The services were operating within a poor strategic framework, resulting from inadequate strategies for SEN and behaviour support.

3. The Best Value review sets out, in the broadest terms, the statutory responsibilities covered by the services but makes little reference to the contribution of the services to the priorities of the council set out in the BSP, the EDP and the strategy for SEN. However, the review appropriately incorporates the delegation of additional SEN funds to schools. It concluded that service provision should be reorganised, that services should contribute more fully to the LEA's strategies for raising standards and inclusion, with a change of emphasis in the deployment of services, from support and intervention for individual pupils to helping schools become better at strategically managing inclusion.

4. Comparative information on service performance was difficult to obtain. However, there has been a good analysis of outcomes and management practice which has set a clear and significant agenda for future action. Other comparisons identified differences in the deployment and management of teams.

5. Comparisons against major cities, statistical neighbours and other metropolitan authorities were made on expenditure on SEN per capita in the schools population, education psychology costs and staffing per pupil. This indicated that the services are expensive (£149 per pupil), well above the average for statistical neighbours and core cities and above average for metropolitan authorities. Services had insufficient information to track the progress of the pupils' they supported. Local indicators demonstrated a rise in new cases and an increase in the number of pupils supported. However, as no targets were set for improvement, services were unable to judge the impact of their support. Attempts to benchmark one service against another were constrained by the inconsistent way in which data was collected from schools across the different services.

6. The review has had a significant impact on the organisation and management of services. Services have been amalgamated and are to be reorganised into multi disciplinary area teams. Planning is improving and is now in line with the priorities

with the LEA's major plans. Team planning follows a consistent format. In addition, appropriate arrangements have begun to delegate SEN services to schools. The schools survey indicates a significant improvement in schools' rating of SEN support since the last inspection, although they judged that performance remains generally satisfactory.

7. Consultation on the Best Value review, conducted by an external consultant, was sound. Stakeholders, including parents, were consulted, though headteachers and governing bodies were omitted. Outcomes were moderately critical. Respondents identified weaknesses in joint consultation for service users and stakeholders, in service planning and expectations, and in partnership working and relationships with the primary care trust. These issues are being dealt with through the improvement plan and elsewhere.

8. The review concludes that the market for alternative providers is undeveloped and that the LEA can best provide services. Future options are considered briefly including consortium arrangements, brokerage and partnership arrangements. However, they are not explored in depth. The delegation of services to schools is explored in depth. Responsibilities for schools and the LEA in a delegated arrangement are well set out.

9. The improvement plan is sound. Priorities within the plan are appropriate. They focus on: establishing an integrated and inclusive support service on a delegated basis; revising the management structure; agreeing monitoring arrangements with schools; developing work on an integrated pathway for children with SEN; and the development of specific quantifiable targets for SEN expenditure and attainment for key groups through which the impact of support can be judged. The plan sets out appropriate actions, timescales, responsibilities and resources.

10. Elected members have demonstrated a strong commitment to the review, through their participation in the review steering group and the regular monitoring of progress on the implementation of the priorities within the improvement plan. Progress on the implementation of the priorities within the plan, reported to scrutiny board in December 2001, is on line to meet target dates.

11. The Best Value review has been well scoped and has been carried out with rigour. The **services are generally satisfactory** and **prospects for improvement** in both services and provision as a result of the review **are promising**.

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