

Sunderland

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: January 2005

Reporting Inspector: Malcolm Wall

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Basic information

Name of LEA:	Sunderland Local Education Authority
LEA number:	394
Address of LEA:	PO Box no 101 Civic Centre Sunderland SR2 7DN
Reporting Inspector:	Malcolm Wall
Date of Inspection:	January 2005

Summary

Introduction

Sunderland local education authority (LEA) comprises the city of Sunderland on the River Wear, Washington, Houghton-le-Spring and Hetton-le-Hole. There are high levels of deprivation and ill health. Eleven of the council's wards are in the top half of the most deprived wards in England and Wales. The overall population is declining, with outward migration leading to an increasing proportion of older people living in the city. Since the previous inspection, the school-aged population has decreased significantly and this decline is set to continue.

Standards of attainment are generally in line with national and statistical neighbours' averages¹ in primary schools, but below national averages at Key Stage 3 and at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. Improvement rates for all three core subjects at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with the national averages. The improvement rate for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE level is above the national trend. Attendance rates have improved and exclusions are decreasing.

Since the previous inspection in 2003, the education service has been restructured. The director of education, newly in post at the time of the previous inspection, has strengthened the senior management team and developed the partnership with schools in preparation for an integrated children's service. A new chief executive joined the council in January 2004 and he has developed, with elected members, a strong focus on creating 'one council' and a strategy that places young people at the heart of the council's work. In June 2004, Labour retained control of the council, the cabinet member and leader of the council have used the ensuing period of stability to improve further the partnership between schools and the council. Sunderland local authority achieved an 'excellent council' rating in the most recent comprehensive performance assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission at the end of 2004.

¹ Sunderland LEA's statistical neighbours are: South Tyneside; Sheffield; Tameside; Stoke-on-Trent; Newcastle upon Tyne; North Tyneside; Portsmouth; Salford; Gateshead; Stockton-on-Tees.

Main findings

Summary: The performance of Sunderland LEA is highly satisfactory. It has made highly satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, most notably in improvements in special educational needs (SEN) and social inclusion. Senior officers have driven change rapidly. The Education Single Plan (ESP) identifies clear priorities for action and progress is monitored rigorously. As a result, schools and other partners share the very clear vision for improvement for children and young people in Sunderland. Elected members provide effective leadership and the council is unequivocal about its corporate priority to improve standards and raise pupils' achievement further. However, more remains to be done, particularly at Key Stage 3, and the recent policy development in SEN and social inclusion need to be consolidated. Nevertheless, schools are optimistic about the future. This LEA knows what it does well and what it needs to do better. Its capacity to improve is highly satisfactory.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity and coherence of corporate and education strategic plans • The leadership of senior officers • Decision-making and consultation with schools • Targeting resources on priorities • Support for Early Years 	
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No schools requiring special measures over the last 2 years • The management of school places and admissions • Asset management planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and co-ordination between the school improvement service, and SEN and social inclusion services
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for information and communication technology • Financial services • Human resources services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of support to schools by property services • Insufficient challenge to schools to improve attainment at Key Stage 3 • Slow development of support to gifted and talented pupils in all primary schools
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision and strategy for SEN • Future role envisaged for special schools • Procedures for statutory assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of impact made by the education psychology service • Lack of specific monitoring of the impact of resources on pupils' achievement
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and the corporate priority given to social inclusion • Monitoring and tracking of vulnerable groups of children • Support for child protection • Improved attainment of looked after children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient challenge to the quality of teaching and learning at the pupil referral unit • Under representation of minority ethnic communities in working groups and as governors • Insufficient use of the analysis of monitoring data about racist incidents to inform future action

Recommendations

Key recommendations

There are no key recommendations

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

There are no recommendations.

Strategy for education and its implementation

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation: Improve the monitoring and support for schools by strengthening the planning and co-ordination of services, particularly those for SEN and social inclusion, with the work of the school improvement service.

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools: Ensure that the notes of visits to schools are consistent, evaluative and clearly identify the areas for improvement.

Support to improve education in schools

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3: Challenge schools consistently on their performance at Key Stage 3, particularly in the use of data for tracking pupils' progress from Key Stage 2.

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children: Disaggregate the data for minority ethnic pupils to ensure that the most able are challenged sufficiently.

Support for gifted and talented pupils: Extend the support from the LEA to all schools to develop and implement the strategy for gifted and talented pupils.

Services to support school management: Improve the communication and quality assurance systems of property services to reflect schools' needs and concerns.

Services to support school improvement: Rationalise the respective roles of the school improvement, SEN and social inclusion services for monitoring and challenging schools, ensuring that responsibilities are clear and manageable.

Support for special educational needs

The strategy for SEN: Finalise a comprehensive map of need and provision for SEN to ensure all schools and partners are clear about how the SEN strategy will unfold over the next three to five years.

SEN functions to support school improvement: Clearly define the role and contribution of the educational psychology service in relation to pupils with SEN and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Value for money: Implement procedures to monitor the impact of central and delegated funding for SEN on pupils' achievement and progress.

Support for social inclusion

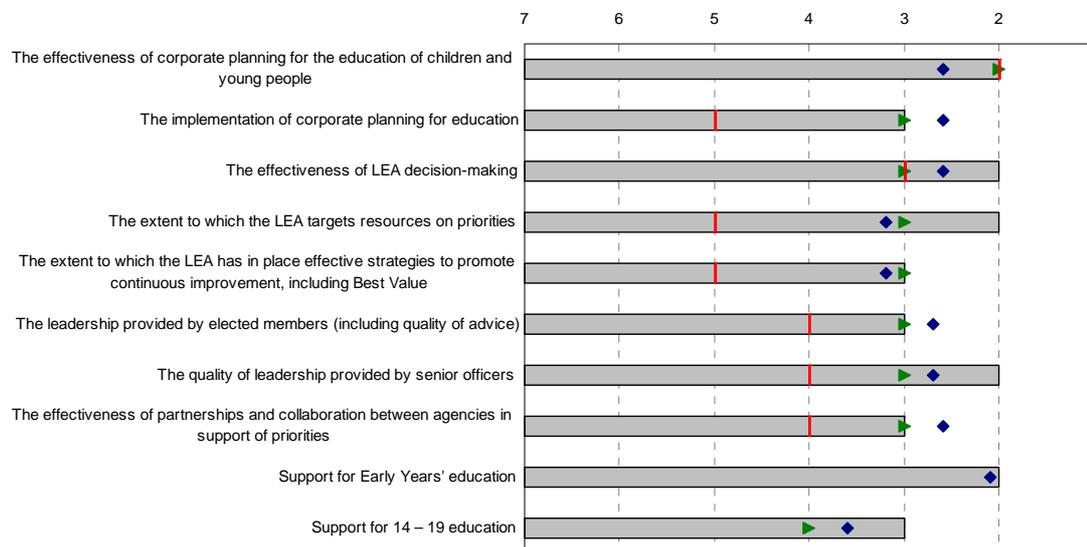
Support for pupils educated other than at school: Improve the monitoring of the pupil referral unit to assure the quality of teaching and learning.

Promoting racial equality:

- Improve the ratio of minority ethnic representatives on working groups, committees and governing bodies to reflect the increasing diversity of the city.
- Use the monitoring of racist incidents data rigorously to follow-up incidents and better inform the responses of schools and governors.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Corporate planning continues to be good. The implementation of corporate plans has improved markedly since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory. The council responded promptly and thoroughly to the recommendations made in the previous report. Clear leadership by elected members and senior officers has promoted a culture of regular and rigorous monitoring of key corporate plans, the ESP and service plans. The cabinet now receives regular reports on progress. Increasingly, good use is made of data to monitor pupils' educational attainment and to target priorities and resources to secure further improvement. Better communication and consultation have improved relationships between schools, partners and the council.

2. Although the LEA is increasingly successful in implementing its plans, it is not yet meeting its targets for pupils' attainment. Some of the targets were overly ambitious and, until recently, have not been closely matched to the prior attainment of individual pupils. Sunderland's first local public service agreement (LPSA) focused on the cross-cutting theme of young people and targets to tackle the issues facing them in a holistic way. The education directorate's targets in the LPSA were challenging, and although not all were met, significant improvements were achieved in attendance. Significantly, the target to increase the number of young people staying on in education and training was exceeded.

3. Education has a very high priority within the council's plans. The Sunderland community strategy rightly identifies raising standards and improving access and participation in learning as a key element in securing the city's economic regeneration. By drawing together key plans and resources, the local strategic partnership (LSP) has both established targets for improvement and provided the resources needed to bring it about. For example, 'pupils first' is focused on two areas of the city and an identified group of pupils for whom improving their attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4 is a key priority within the ESP. The interim evaluation shows that the attainment of these pupils is improving at a rate beyond that which might have been expected without the intervention.

4. The ESP is well integrated within other corporate plans. It links the priorities for the directorate and schools to the council's corporate objectives and ambitions for education very effectively. Progress is reviewed regularly and the range of performance indicators used at the various levels of monitoring is good. The ESP, like all the council's plans, is securely linked to the medium-term financial strategy. The education budget is well managed.

Decision-making

5. Decision-making has improved and is now good. Thorough consultation and communication with schools and other stakeholders are now strengths. Schools and partners report they are well informed and able to influence decisions. Members and officers use evidence and data well to conduct a rigorous analysis of available options, as exemplified by the successful removal of surplus school places and the decisions about which schools are involved in the first round of the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme.

6. The council has modernised its structure, with clear levels of delegation to the cabinet member for education, and to senior officers. Enhanced transparency is characterised by the publication of the council's forward plan, which identifies when key decisions are to be taken. There is political consensus among senior elected members about education matters. Elected members have ready access to senior officers and regular briefings keep them well informed about emerging issues. Headteachers rightly appreciate the priority education now has in Sunderland.

Targeting of resources

7. The LEA's targeting of resources to priorities is good. At the previous inspection it was unsatisfactory, mainly because of the high level of primary school balances and the absence of any systematic challenge to schools from the LEA. This shortcoming has been tackled; the Schools Forum has agreed rigorous procedures for holding schools to account. Primary balances are at average levels and secondary balances, though above average in total, are particularly high in only two schools.

8. Schools are in no doubt about the council's commitment to education. Spending on education relative to other areas has increased year-on-year. It is now

just above the level of the education Formula Spending Share and all government requirements for passing on additional funding to schools have been met. The council has gained access to substantial amounts of external funding for education, over £50 million in the last five years, in addition to those funds to which there is an automatic entitlement. Its approach to managing grants and supporting schools is set out in a clear policy that takes full account of risk and sustainability.

9. In other respects the council has continued to build on its record of very sound financial management. Financial planning is closely linked to service planning within the framework of a three-year medium-term financial strategy. The ESP identifies key priorities, clearly sets out the resources required to deliver the different elements. Consultation is well-organised and thorough.

10. Budget management is good. Budgets are generally accurate, kept under review as part of the planning process and monitored rigorously. Budget responsibilities and accountabilities are clearly identified. The funding formula is finely tuned to meeting the needs of schools; it is maintained carefully and changes have been made each year to ensure its continuing effectiveness.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

11. The authority's strategies to promote continuous improvement were previously unsatisfactory; they are now highly satisfactory. The approach is refreshingly straight forward and effective, with a sharp focus on agreeing with elected members, officers, schools and other stakeholders exactly what needs to be done to improve performance, and then doing it. Nevertheless, some of these strategies have been in place for no more than one full cycle, so their impact is limited and new approaches are not yet fully embedded.

12. The ESP provides a strong basis for performance management. A range of stakeholders, including young people, were thoroughly involved in its development. The plan links coherently up to corporate plans and down to service plans and individual work programmes. It has incorporated the recommendations from the previous inspection, and these have been systematically implemented. Milestones are set and progress is tracked openly and transparently through an electronic on-line facility, to which schools have access. The change monitoring group, which is chaired by an assistant chief executive and includes headteachers, an elected member and a governor representative, has a high profile and is rigorous in holding officers to account.

13. Sound arrangements are in place for tracking individual performance through performance contracts for senior staff and an appraisal scheme for all other staff. Good use has been made of external challenge through a peer review from another local authority, and more regularly, from the corporate performance team and through a council-wide performance improvement group. Capacity has been augmented through the productive use of consultants and associate headteachers seconded from schools. The LEA's self-evaluation was prepared in consultation with other departments of the council and schools. It demonstrates a very sound

assessment of how much has been achieved, what still needs to be done, and that the LEA knows itself well.

14. The Best Value review regime has not, in itself, provided a particular impetus for improvement within education, although it has benefited from some changes to corporate procedures and services as a result. The council has now instituted a new programme of corporate performance improvement reviews, to which the education service is expected to make a full contribution.

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

15. The leadership of elected members is now highly satisfactory. Schools are more convinced about the effectiveness of that leadership and are impressed by members' increasing involvement in education as governors, through visits to schools by the leader of the council and the cabinet member, and by the work of the deputy leader of the council in the change monitoring group. Members recognise that at the time of the previous report their own knowledge of the education service's work was limited. This has been rectified. The cabinet is now well informed, and advice to members is timely and well focused on steps needed to bring about improvement.

16. Relationships between senior officers, the leader of the council and the cabinet member for education are good. Elected members understand their strategic role and delegate appropriately to senior officers. The work of scrutiny is developing as more effective use is made of external experts to support in-depth reviews. There is a clear work programme for scrutiny that has an appropriate balance of regular reports and longer term reviews to inform policy making. Elected members have shown themselves to be sensitive and astute when, for example, it has been necessary to take difficult decisions to close schools to reduce surplus places.

Leadership by senior officers

17. The quality of leadership provided by senior officers is now good. Rapid progress has been made since the previous inspection in developing a clear strategic vision. The director of education has brought drive, commitment, rigour and openness to the leadership of the education service. Following the previous inspection, good support has been provided by the chief executive's department, particularly on performance review. Senior officers are very clear about the focus of their work to raise pupils' standards of achievement and to support the council's priority for the regeneration of the city. This has been communicated well and is supported by headteachers and other stakeholders.

18. Schools appreciate and respect the open and challenging dialogue they now have with senior officers. This has not always been comfortable, particularly when officers provide the degree of challenge necessary for improvement. Nevertheless, good leadership by senior officers has markedly improved communication and consultation with schools, and a much improved level of trust now characterises

relationships. As a consequence, collaboration and effective partnership work are developing well in Sunderland, as exemplified by the high level of support for the strategy for educational inclusion and the greatly reduced number of pupils excluded permanently or for a fixed term.

Strategic partnerships

19. Partnership work and collaboration with other agencies are highly satisfactory, and the LEA has met the recommendation in the previous report. There are clear links between the council's strategic plans, such as the preventive strategy, and those of its partners, for example the LSP. Individual partnerships, such as that for the early years, are now firmly embedded in the ESP. As a result, progress and impact are monitored and evaluated well. Sunderland has many established partnerships and is very active in developing new ones that support its stated priorities. These include the strategies for developing specialist and extended schools and improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils through the 'pupils first' pilot.

20. Elected members, senior officers and headteachers have been proactive partners in the development of Sunderland's Community Strategy and the increasingly effective work of the LSP. Together with the shadow children's trust and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) this level of collaboration positions Sunderland well to develop integrated children's services. Strategic planning with health and social services is very secure, and although education was initially slower to engage with the CYPSP, collaborative work has become increasingly effective. Partnership work has led to improvement in specific areas, for example, in improving rates of attendance and better access to child and mental health services.

Support for Early Years

21. Support for early years education and childcare is good. This is a priority for the council and the support is managed effectively by the early years and childcare team. Links with the newly re-structured Early Years and Child Care Strategic Partnership are good. Although the partnership has a suitable range of members from most sectors, the private and voluntary settings are currently under-represented. Good strategies are in place for further raising attainment in the early years and for the development of services for children and their families. The ESP now gives high status to early years and ensures that the Sure Start programme is monitored closely, and that the links with the CYPSP are very clear and secure.

22. Sound progress has been made with seven Sure Start local programmes. Plans are well developed to build on these to ensure children's centres offer a wide range of services in all areas of disadvantage across the city. Effective partnership and multi-agency work between education, health and social services provide integrated services for children and families. As a result, the range of childcare and early education provision is good. All three-year-old children can have access to a nursery education place. Maintained nursery schools and classes are being

encouraged to provide wrap-around care, although the LEA knows that it needs to ensure that there is a balance of provision to meet the needs of all parents and carers.

23. The Foundation Stage profile is integrated well within the ESP and the strategy for raising attainment. Data are routinely used to inform planning and to identify those settings where improvement is required. The LEA has recognised that headteachers need more support to analyse and use data from the profile. The re-introduction of the 'flying start' baseline assessment is a welcome addition to the data used to assist children in the transition from early years settings to mainstream schools. This has proved particularly successful in schools and voluntary and private sector settings would now benefit from it being shared, and promoted, with them.

Support for 14-19 education

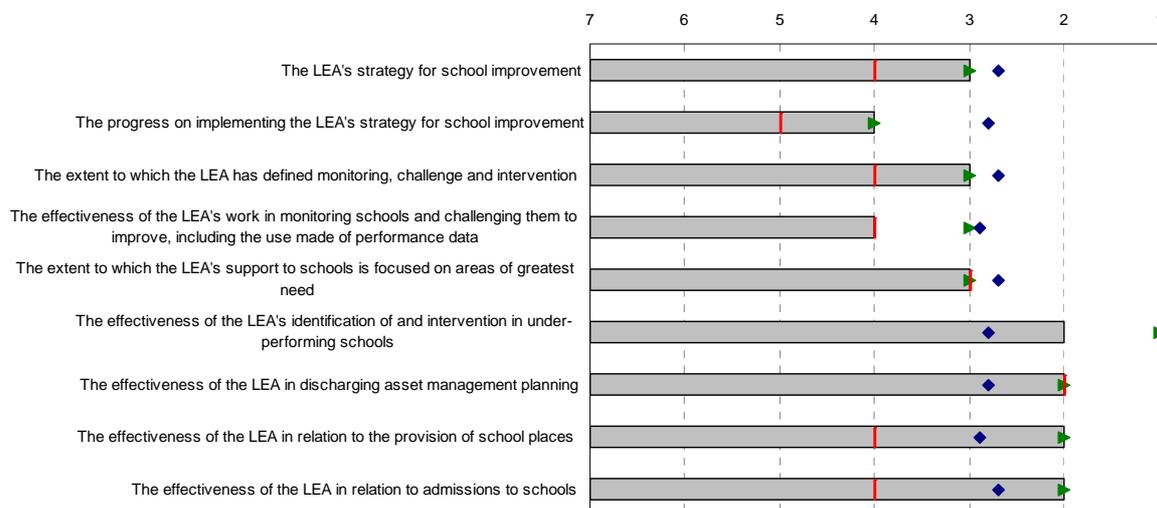
24. The LEA's support for 14–19 education is highly satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, most partnership arrangements have been formalised; there has been an extensive audit of provision; and valuable, but isolated developments, have been drawn together into a clear and coherent strategy.

25. Collaborative arrangements are strong. Two new collaborative sixth-forms are now operating successfully in Sunderland South and Washington, with a further one planned. Headteachers and governors of 11-16 schools are now directly involved in decision-making following Sunderland College's decision to reconstitute its governing body. Schools' staff mentor, guide and support the learning of their pupils transferring to sixth form provision. This offers young people good continuity.

26. Similarly, the involvement of the work-based learning providers is increasingly influential, offering a range of suitable vocational opportunities to young people. Further work is needed, for example, to consolidate the 14–19 action plan, and three secondary schools are yet to agree the overall strategy. More progress has to be made with the 14–16 curriculum strand, particularly in the light of the weaknesses at Key Stage 3. Nevertheless, the take-up of pupils for vocational courses for 14–16 year-olds has increased by 59% and is expected to increase further in 2006. Participation rates are moving progressively towards the target of 85%. Exclusions have reduced, and pupils' results in vocational and academic courses are improving steadily.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

27. Sunderland now has a highly satisfactory strategy for school improvement and is making satisfactory progress with its implementation. The LEA has had a very good record of preventing schools falling into Ofsted categories despite, recently, one school being identified as having serious weaknesses. The planning and provision of school places, asset management planning, and support for admissions to schools are good. The LEA carries out its monitoring, support, intervention and challenge functions satisfactorily to identify schools' strengths and weaknesses and allocates support accordingly, and in accordance with the Code of Practice for LEA/school relations. The school improvement strategy is coherent and works well for those schools categorised as of cause of concern to the LEA. However, the co-ordination of the work of the school improvement, SEN and inclusion services, although improving, is a relatively recent development and has yet to make the necessary impact on the performance of all schools.

28. The ESP is comprehensive, with clear aims that provide the backbone for all school improvement work. Activities are well matched to priorities and many have timescales that are very challenging in order to bring about the improvement needed. Helpful milestones, the clarity of the lines of accountability, and the measurable outcomes, make a daunting agenda very manageable for those involved. Implementation is spurred on by the impressive 'traffic light' monitoring system, which identifies whether actions are completed, are on course, or behind schedule. This is an open, live electronic system, so monitoring is continuous and can be

checked at any time by those involved, including schools. Few actions are behind schedule and where they are, the reasons are scrutinised and those responsible are held to account.

29. The picture of progress towards targets is an improving one, although results are below national averages. In previous years, there were significant gaps between the LEA's and schools' aggregated targets, and too many schools have failed to meet their overall targets. However, the LEA has worked hard to improve this position and it now has reliable data at the individual pupil level. This is shared with schools, and the targets for 2006 and beyond are now based securely on pupils' prior attainment. Although still below its ambitious targets for Key Stage 2, considerable progress has been made to close the gap. In 2003, the LEA was very close to its targets for five or more A*-C grades at GCSE and exceeded the target for five or more A*-G grades. Focused support to schools is improving the progress they make towards targets, often at a greater rate than nationally. However, the LEA has not challenged schools sufficiently to raise pupils' standards of attainment at Key Stage 3.

Recommendation

- Improve the monitoring and support for schools by strengthening the planning and co-ordination of services, particularly those for SEN and social inclusion, with the work of the school improvement service.

The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support

30. The LEA's definition of monitoring challenge and intervention is now highly satisfactory. The policy for schools causing concern sets out a well differentiated approach to support and intervention. This is based on sound data and well-defined and detailed criteria. It is consistently applied and this has contributed to the good record of effective support for schools with weaknesses.

31. A revised policy has been developed recently that retains the strengths of the previous policy, adheres closely to the Code of Practice, uses school self-evaluation as a basis for self-categorisation and is currently the subject of consultation with schools. The approach is being trialled with a group of schools. More generally, all schools recognise the need for the changes, particularly the emphasis on monitoring and challenge, and understand the reasons for the development.

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools

32. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's work was satisfactory and it remains so. It has maintained its good record for preventing the vast majority of schools falling into Ofsted categories. The school improvement service has been restructured under new leadership. The focus of the service's work has been changed from predominantly one that gave advice to schools to one that challenges

their performance on the basis of effective monitoring and evaluation. The work of school improvement officers is increasingly well respected by schools but the outcomes of the regular visits to schools are not yet sufficiently evaluative nor are areas for improvement always challenging or conveyed explicitly. Consequently, although satisfactory progress has been made, there is still much to do to consolidate new systems and processes.

33. Improvement work in schools is now based on much improved data, which includes detailed information about vulnerable groups and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. An emerging strength is the way in which data are being analysed and used more systematically and with greater sophistication to challenge schools. A good example is the recent introduction of the Fisher Family Trust data, which is improving schools' ability to make better use of individual pupils' prior attainment. The LEA has also used an external consultant to lead work on detailed analysis of value-added data about pupils' progress among different groups, for example, boys' achievement.

Recommendation

- Ensure that the notes of visits to schools are consistent, evaluative and clearly identify the areas for improvement.

Providing school places

34. The planning of school places is now good. The main challenge continues to be the continuing decline in pupil numbers. The LEA was criticised at the previous inspection for an initial lack of ambition in facing this challenge. Since then the number of surplus places in primary schools has been tackled resolutely and with considerable success. Over 3,000 places have been removed since the beginning of the second phase of the review in January 2003. This is no mean achievement, and it has been managed with comparatively little disruption and no recourse to the Adjudicator. Moreover, opportunities have been taken to align school reorganisation with the implementation of other corporate priorities, for example, to promote service integration by the development of extended schools and children's centres. A key reason for the LEA's success has been its thorough consultation and its preparedness to listen and revise proposals, where appropriate.

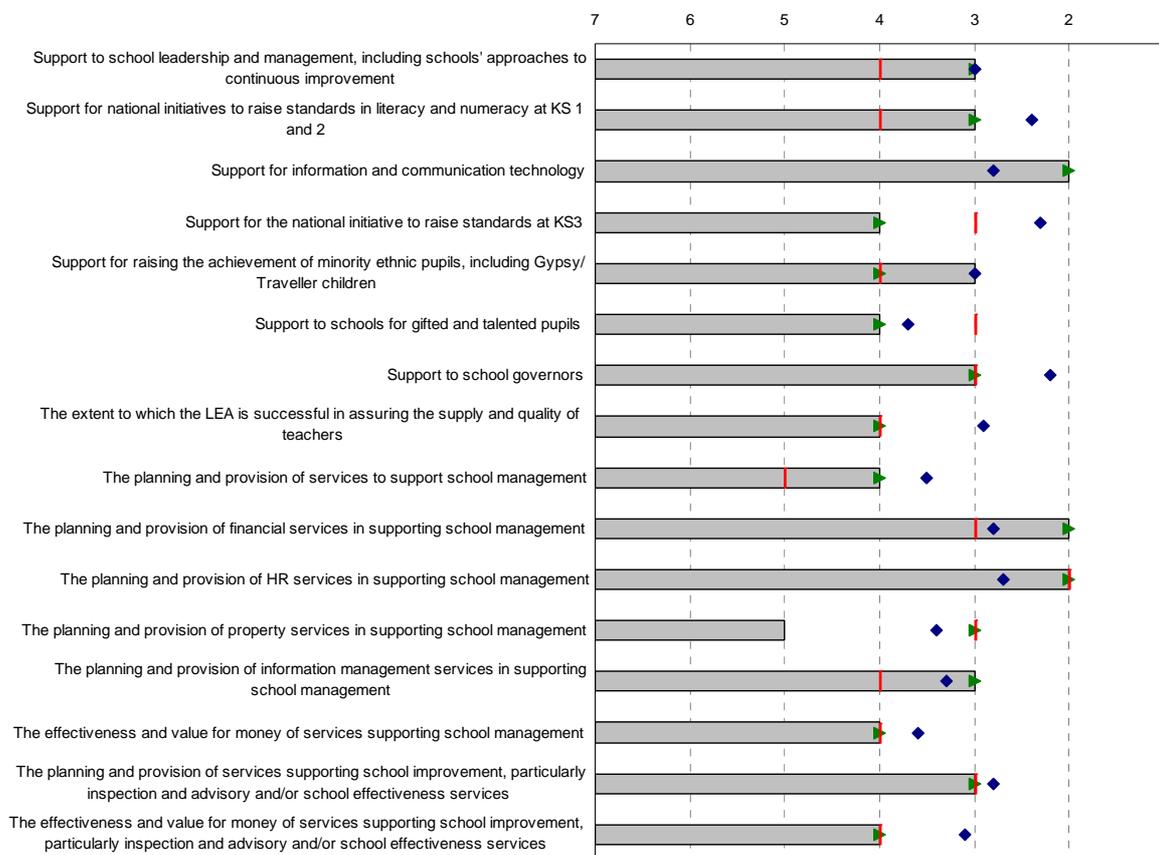
35. Long-term proposals for the reorganisation of secondary schools are based on a successful bid under the Government's programme 'Building Schools for the Future'. Although there are currently uncertainties about whether the total package can be implemented as first proposed, the first phase will tackle those schools with the greatest number of surplus places and the poorest buildings. The immediate priorities in the secondary sector have, however, already been addressed. The reorganisation proposal in Washington has resulted in the agreement to close one school.

36. The School Organisation Plan is concise and well presented, setting out clearly the LEA's strategy for tackling the major challenge of falling rolls. The

coverage of the plan is sound, with information now included on early years and post-16 provision, as recommended at the previous inspection.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

37. The LEA's support for this function is now highly satisfactory. Significant improvements have been made in key areas, namely: the move towards effective brokerage of curriculum and professional development services; sharing good practice; financial and human resource services; and the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. The support for information and communication technology and the provision of human resource services continues to be good. Highly satisfactory support has been maintained for the primary strategy and governors. The LEA's work in assuring the quality and supply of teachers is satisfactory. However, the planning and provision of property services to schools are unsatisfactory and slower, although sufficient, progress has been made with the strategies to support gifted and talented pupils and pupils at Key Stage 3.

38. The LEA has an established and effective arrangement with external partners to support the development of middle and senior managers in schools. Ofsted school inspections show that leadership and management in schools are at least highly satisfactory. The Leadership Incentive Grant and Excellence in Cities (EiC) funds are used effectively to support and improve the management of schools. The LEA promotes good and interesting practice through 'the learning and improving together' publication. This provides opportunities to benefit from partnerships such as Leading Edge and specialist schools; advanced skills teachers (ASTs); leading teachers and consultants; networking through learning communities; and the National Leading Aspects Award. These initiatives focus on improving the quality of teaching, and leadership and management in schools and, as such, play a central part in the LEA's strategy for improving pupils' standards of achievement.

39. New and acting head teachers value the induction they receive, particularly the opportunity for peer mentor support. The LEA knows its schools well; it monitors the quality of leadership and management of schools effectively through the regular visits to schools and the information shared in the termly cross service meetings of LEA officers. It uses its statutory powers effectively when necessary to bring about improvement.

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

40. At the time of the previous inspection support for Key Stage 3 was highly satisfactory. It is now only satisfactory. In 2003, although standards rose in English, and mathematics improved slightly, they remained below the national average. In science, standards have remained static and below those nationally. The rates of improvement in all three core subjects are in line with the national averages, although those for English and mathematics are below those of similar authorities. In 2004, provisional data show that standards dropped in English and science, but they rose slightly in mathematics. Targets set in 2004 were not achieved; those for 2005, although based on more secure pupil data, are challenging.

41. The leadership of the strategy has become more rigorous, and schools are increasingly held to account for their performance. Communication and liaison between school improvement officers and strategy consultants have also improved, although, until recently, school improvement officers have not had sufficient data to challenge schools effectively. Schools rate the quality of support provided by the strategy consultants very highly. Data show that those schools targeted for intensive consultant support made better progress than schools in Sunderland overall.

42. Strategy plans for schools are generally good and there are examples of well-written intervention plans. The agreements Key Stage 3 consultants make with schools vary in quality and rigour, but all are satisfactory and the best are very good. Additionally, improved data have led to better knowledge of the performance of individual pupils, particularly the attainment of boys, Bangladeshi heritage and looked after children. However, pupil level data are not yet used consistently by schools or by the LEA to measure pupil progress below Year 9. Not all secondary

schools track pupils' performance rigorously from the end of Key Stage 2, and the LEA has not challenged them to do so. Nevertheless, schools report that the increased emphasis on improving teaching and learning has improved the quality of teaching in schools. This is supported by the evidence from Ofsted's inspection of schools.

43. The LEA has built on earlier work to develop more effective curricular transition between Key Stages 2 and 3. This is a priority in the ESP for 2005, but progress to date has been limited, although individual projects have demonstrated early success. The LEA has already begun to collect data and information relevant to Sunderland schools, through interviews with pupils and through sampling their work. There are appropriate plans to use the analysis of this data to support consultants and school improvement officers in challenging and improving current practice.

Recommendation

- Challenge schools consistently on their performance at Key Stage 3, particularly in the use of data for tracking pupils' progress from Key Stage 2.

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children

44. The LEA's work in this area is now highly satisfactory. Schools report that support for pupils with English as an additional language has improved. A programme of support targeted in two city wards has resulted in Bangladeshi pupils making good progress. Attainment targets for 2004 in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 and the target for the percentage achieving five or more A*- C grades at GCSE have all been met or exceeded and, with the exception of English and science at Key Stage 3, there is an improving trend at all levels. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils achieving five or more A*- G grades at GCSE in 2004 was well above the national figure.

45. The Traveller children support team continues to provide good and well targeted support for Traveller children in specific schools. As a result, the travelling community ensure that their children attend school for tests and examinations. Individual pupils make at least satisfactory progress in Key Stage 2, all Year 11 pupils (19) were entered for GCSE examinations and, of these, 16 pupils achieved at least one pass grade.

46. The LEA is making increasingly sophisticated and astute use of the good data it has on its minority ethnic pupils. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant has been well targeted in order to improve the achievement of Bangladeshi heritage pupils. Monitoring of the attainment of Sikh heritage pupils has been less effective because they are dispersed in small numbers across the authority's schools. Data on these pupils are mostly subsumed within the broader categories of pupils with Indian and

Pakistani heritage. As a consequence the LEA has insufficient evidence to show they are making the expected rate of progress.

Recommendation

- Disaggregate the data for minority ethnic pupils to ensure that the most able are challenged sufficiently.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

47. Support for the provision for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory. It was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection but progress in this area has been too slow. The recommendations from the previous inspection have not been implemented fully and some activities are at an early stage of development. At Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, the achievement of more able pupils is variable, at Key Stage 3 it is below average. However, at Key Stage 4 there has been some improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving A and A* grades at GCSE.

48. Support for the gifted and talented strategy in secondary schools has been sustained by EiC funding but only just over half of all primary schools have an identified co-ordinator. Most recently, EiC resources have been made available to 20 primary schools to extend the strategy. However, the LEA's support for other primary schools has not been consistent, although those that have received support report that it has been of a high quality. Critically, there is currently no support for gifted and talented pupils in the Foundation Stage or in special schools.

49. The draft strategy for gifted and talented pupils is very recent but it follows a lengthy consultation with schools. Appropriately, it reflects a change of emphasis from enrichment activities to a focus on high quality teaching and learning which is in line with the national primary and secondary improvement strategies. The emerging partnership between the school improvement service and the EiC initiative in leading this development work supports these developments well, particularly around transition at Key Stages 2 and 3. Support for gifted and talented pupils remains a priority in the EiC plan. There are individual examples of highly effective projects and partnerships, including summer schools, which have raised attainment in individual subjects. Officers have rightly identified the need to improve the collection and monitoring of achievement data. Improved pupil-level data now support schools better in tracking the progress of pupils, but there is little evidence of how the analysis of data has led to greater challenge to schools or systematic evaluation of improved achievements.

Recommendation

- Extend the support from the LEA to all schools to develop and implement the strategy for gifted and talented pupils.

The supply and quality of teachers

50. This aspect of the LEA's work is satisfactory. The percentage of unfilled vacancies in Sunderland's schools is broadly in line with the national average. However, schools are beginning to experience difficulty with both the quality and number of applications for teaching posts. The LEA has yet to agree a recruitment and retention strategy with schools.

51. The LEA is improving its data about the workforce to identify the key priorities for the recruitment and retention strategy. The LEA has identified that secondary schools are finding increasing difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified specialist staff in science, mathematics and English. Initiatives such as the recruitment of ASTs, specialist schools offering science as a second specialism and local higher education courses represent a practical response. However, many of these initiatives are recent and need to be consolidated into a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy that is agreed with schools. The LEA has a clear picture of the quality of teaching in schools. Inspection findings indicate that the proportion of very good or good teaching is better than the national picture for both primary and secondary schools.

52. Arrangements for the induction and support of newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) are of a high standard. The retention rate of NQTs into their second year is well above the rate nationally. A carefully structured induction programme is in place for newly appointed headteachers. Opportunities for teachers and headteachers to share their expertise, for example by working as associate headteachers, ASTs and leading teachers, provide an effective means of professional development. The LEA has made significant progress with implementation of the national workforce reform agreement. Schools have been well supported with sound advice and briefings.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

53. The planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management are satisfactory. The clarity of service specification and flexibility of provision were previously unsatisfactory. These shortcomings have been tackled with some rigour. Progress has, however, been slower in supporting schools to become discerning purchasers and in developing the brokerage of services.

54. The 'Services to Schools' brochure has been revised and takes account of recommendations made at the previous inspection. For most services, differentiated levels of service are available, depending on schools' needs. Core and traded elements of each service are well-defined and service standards clearly specified. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are generally sound and include termly reporting to the strategy and performance group. Comprehensive information is helpfully provided on centrally-funded services as well as traded services, thus promoting further the directorate's accountability to schools. Schools receive

information on services in good time to make informed decisions. Schools report a high level of satisfaction with services, particularly finance, human resources and ICT. Costs are reasonable and benchmarked against those of other authorities.

55. Some progress has been made in developing the LEA's role as a broker rather than simply as a provider of services. Alternative suppliers of a range of other services are now identified on the website for schools, although the use of this is not monitored. Other developments are too recent to have yet made an impact: a corporate procurement unit has been in place since April 2004 and is now formally offering its expertise to schools.

56. Financial services are good and have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Support and guidance to schools on financial planning and management are thorough and very well regarded. Helpful budget modelling is provided for schools. The LEA has a sound awareness of the quality of financial management in individual schools. This knowledge feeds into the LEA's systematic arrangements for sharing information about all aspects of schools. The current financial management system is just adequate for schools' needs and is now being replaced; 'pilot' schools trialling the new system are optimistic about the opportunities it offers.

57. Property services are unsatisfactory. In the school survey, a substantial minority of both primary and secondary schools rate building maintenance services as poor or very poor. A recent survey of schools, conducted by an associate headteacher, corroborated this evidence. The main areas of dissatisfaction are poor communications, unreliable supervision of contracts and the lack of a prompt response, for example, on quotations for work. While there are systems in place for quality assurance, these are not effective in providing accurate intelligence about the performance of property services in relation to day-to-day operations. Furthermore, there continues to be confusion about the respective roles of the council's property services and building maintenance division. Nevertheless, there are strengths in both planning and delivery, including a comprehensive property management file, the governors' maintenance plan and a good record in responding to emergency calls from schools.

Recommendation

- Improve the communication and quality assurance systems of property services to reflect schools' needs and concerns.

58. Information management services are highly satisfactory. All the relevant indicators in the school survey have improved and the LEA is in the top quarter of authorities for the quality of its technical support. The LEA's strategy is clear and well-aligned with that of the council. Sound progress has been made over the last two years in moving from broadly *ad hoc* arrangements towards a system which integrates data across both schools and the education directorate. However, significant elements are still to be implemented and software faults hampered the introduction of new pupil data modules. Nevertheless, electronic communications

generally work well; technical support is generally good; service standards are clear; and the systems for quality assurance are well-organised.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

59. The LEA has made satisfactory progress with all these functions and this is now highly satisfactory. Leadership of the services is strong. There is a purposeful vision and clear strategic direction which has motivated all staff and given them a good grasp of the improvement agenda. This clear commitment to improving schools influences all decision-making. Service planning is thorough. Staff deployment is effective and makes good use of the skills and expertise of individuals. All school improvement activities are closely linked to the ESP. This provides the framework for setting and monitoring targets and individual performance management agreements.

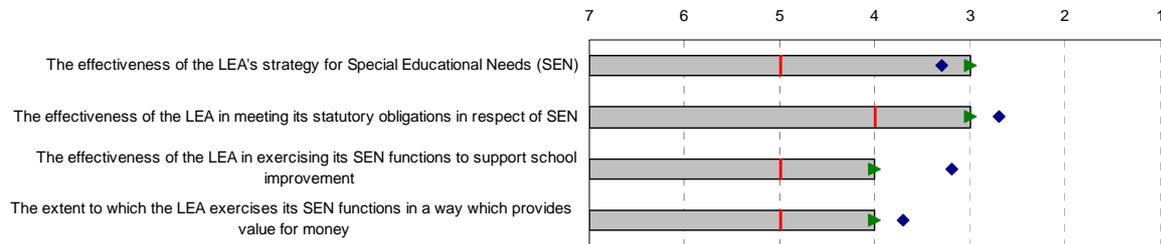
60. The school improvement service has only been at full strength since the start of the year. Its work, although recognised as central to the monitoring function of the LEA, is not yet wholly consistent or rigorous. The chief inspector has therefore rightly invested in the induction and training of all school improvement officers. Several are new, and will take time to become established, but they have the expertise and skills necessary to be effective. Changes to the role of school improvement officers have increased the workload. Their contribution to the monitoring cycle for schools, together with that of SEN and social inclusion services, is under review but the LEA has yet to finalise these arrangements. It needs to do so quickly if individuals or services are not to be in danger of being overburdened by the scale of the tasks. Services to support school improvement are at least satisfactory. Schools report their increasing confidence in the quality and effectiveness of most of these services. Approaches to brokerage and procurement are still being developed, but the authority is making good use of external consultants to support and further improve the quality of its services. The LEA devolves a high proportion of the Standards Fund to support school improvement and the costs of services supporting school improvement are reasonable. Therefore, overall effectiveness and value for money are satisfactory.

Recommendation

- Rationalise the respective roles of the school improvement, SEN and social inclusion services for monitoring and challenging schools, ensuring that responsibilities are clear and manageable.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for SEN

61. The LEA's strategy for SEN was unsatisfactory; good progress has been made and it is now highly satisfactory. The LEA and its schools are firmly committed to inclusion. The pace of change has been rapid, involving consultation with schools and other stakeholders, and the implementation of new structures and systems. Although some schools have taken a little time to come to terms with the new model of provision they now understand what it means for their pupils. The strategy for SEN unequivocally places the child at its heart and meets the Government's agenda for action. It responds to local needs through the reduction of statutory referrals, increased delegation of funds to schools, and a model of provision which builds on the expertise of both special schools and specialist units within mainstream schools.

62. This transformation has been achieved through assertive leadership by senior officers. They have led by example and swiftly gained the trust and confidence of schools and other stakeholders who feel that they are consulted and listened to carefully. Strategic partnerships with health and social services, and joint commissioning of services are leading to improved and more targeted services that bring about improvement for pupils. The number of statements reduced dramatically in 2003/4. Costs, overall, are in line with those in other LEAs. The ESP and service plans ensure that the current priorities and targets are clear and that the recommendations from the previous inspection have been acted upon. These plans are monitored rigorously and benchmark data are being used to challenge performance.

63. The SEN and school improvement services have rightly identified the need to establish procedures and guidelines for the monitoring of the progress of specific groups of pupils. The school self evaluation schedule was trialled in 2004 and is scheduled to be implemented in 2005. It will be supported by a data profile which will enable school improvement officers to challenge more securely the effectiveness of schools in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. The fast pace of change and

ongoing consultation with schools has meant that the new strategy is not yet fully enacted. Plans and procedures are still evolving, although audit and provision maps are more advanced in some areas they do not yet give the full picture of need or provision across the full spectrum of SEN. Outcomes cannot yet be measured and plans to evaluate impact are in the early stages of development. Protocols with other agencies are new and have not yet been fully tested.

Recommendation

- Finalise a comprehensive map of need and provision for SEN to ensure all schools and partners are clear about how the SEN strategy will unfold over the next three to five years.

Statutory obligations

64. The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations is now highly satisfactory. The LEA provides comprehensive advice and guidance to schools through the SEN handbook. Schools report that procedures are transparent and that communication is good. Statutory duties are met. The majority of statements are now completed on time and their quality has improved. Annual reviews are monitored systematically and officers attend where needed. Transition reviews are completed as appropriate. Schools are confident that the policy to reduce the number of statements will lead to improved and better targeted support for pupils with SEN.

65. Information for parents is clear and translation services are available to parents who require them. The LEA's website meets statutory requirements although it is not always easy to locate key information, and documentation is not always presented clearly. Parent groups have been involved in consultation about the changes to SEN provision; this process needs to be maintained. The parent partnership officer has good professional knowledge and good contacts with parent groups and independent and voluntary groups. However, there is no independent evaluation of the effectiveness of this service. Complaints resolution procedures are generally effective.

SEN functions to support school improvement

66. This aspect of the LEA's work is satisfactory and the capacity to secure further improvement is sound. Dialogue and partnership between the school improvement and SEN services have improved. The LEA now has data at individual pupil level and schools have received training in the use of these data. A sound plan is in place to develop better value-added information drawing on both these data and national curriculum outcomes. These will contribute to an individual data profile for each school which will enable schools to evaluate their own performance and compare it with that of other schools in Sunderland.

67. Local Sure Start programmes have been able to identify the children with SEN and provide early multi-agency intervention, but there is no audit of SEN needs in

other early years settings. It is planned for later in the year but, currently, there is only limited information to enable all settings to target their support or evaluate the impact of their work for children with SEN. All special schools now have an attached school improvement officer and welcome this additional challenge. Links with the national strategies are now established and regular meetings have been introduced to focus on inclusion issues. A joint programme of training and development has also been agreed across services. However, these formalised links between the SEN and school improvement services are relatively new and have therefore had little time to demonstrate impact.

68. The LEA has been very successful in reducing substantially the number of referrals and pupils requiring a statement of SEN. This has released time for officers and education psychologists to work more efficiently. The education psychology service has been reorganised but the resulting high turnover of staff disrupted continuity and weakened the confidence schools had in the service. The service is now almost at full complement, but its contribution to the LEA's inclusion and school improvement priorities is not clearly defined, and a gap still exists in the support available to pupils who have emotional, behavioural and social difficulties.

69. Schools are well supported through special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) networks. These have recently been reorganised, and schools have welcomed the change, particularly the improved level of communication. Training for SEN is comprehensive and well matched to the needs of schools. That offered by the school improvement service and the national strategy consultants provides good support for teachers, learning support assistants and teaching assistants.

Recommendation

- Clearly define the role and contribution of the educational psychology service in relation to pupils with SEN and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Value for money

70. The value for money of SEN support and provision has improved and is now satisfactory. The SEN budget is managed well and costs compare favourably with those in other local authorities. There has been a very substantial reduction in the number of statements and the number of pupils placed in schools outside the local authority is low. The criteria for the identification of pupils with SEN are consistent with national policy. Consultation on the high level of funding delegated to schools from April 2004 has been thorough. Schools welcome the increased flexibility and transparency. Bureaucracy has been reduced and schools now understand better the link between referrals and statutory assessments.

71. The policy to promote greater inclusion in mainstream schools builds well on the expertise of special schools by commissioning them to undertake outreach work and develop opportunities for dual pupil registration. At the same time, all schools have greater say over how the funding is spent. Systems for monitoring SEN

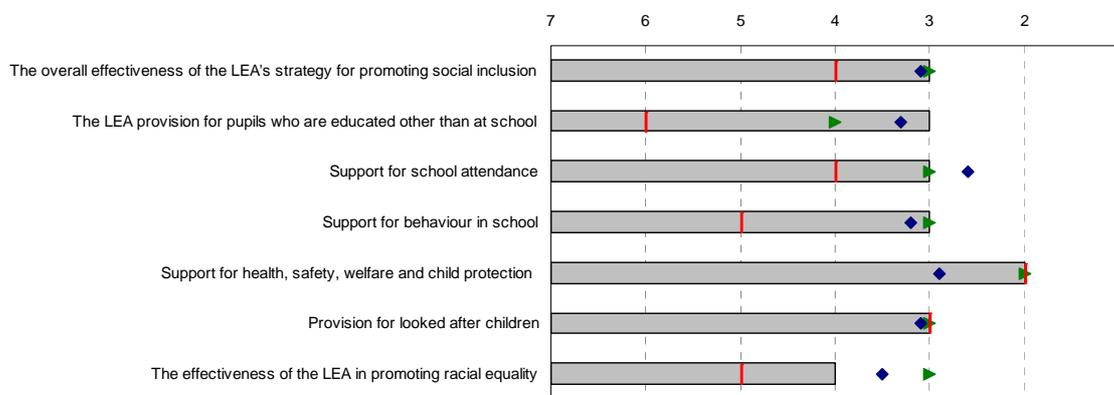
budgets are secure and benchmarking data are used effectively. A detailed monitoring and evaluation policy for SEN has been drawn up but there has been little monitoring so far of the impact of central or delegated funding on pupils' achievement and progress.

Recommendation

- Implement procedures to monitor the impact of central and delegated funding for SEN on pupils' achievement and progress.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for social inclusion

72. This has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The capacity for further improvement is good. Social inclusion is a key priority in the vision for Sunderland and is reflected in the strategic aims of the LEA and woven consistently through its plans and actions. Planning for social inclusion is highly satisfactory and development plans are closely monitored by officers and elected members. Work to close the gap between the achievement of different groups of children and young people and to improve their participation in education is increasingly coherent, and across a range of programmes. The strategy is clearly understood by elected members who have allocated additional funds as part of their commitment to raising the achievement of all pupils.

73. Stakeholders and schools are committed to working collaboratively to support achievement and to ensure that children receive effective and easily accessible services that meet their need. This has been made possible by the skill and experience of officers in promoting the agreed philosophy and new ways of work. A key factor in this improvement has also been the quality of communication and involvement of all partners. There is a strong commitment by key partners to improve services for children and young people through the shadow children's trust. This provides a sound foundation for further progress.

74. Sunderland has improved the quality and effectiveness of its services and is beginning to engage schools in preventive ways of work. The role for schools in protecting children is clearly understood. Some of the improvement is due to the good use the LEA has made of national initiatives and funding to promote new and more effective ways of working. Pupils experiencing difficulties now receive a better

and a more timely response from services, ensuring that basic need is met, such as support for children with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and the provision of full-time education for children without a school place. Other functions of the LEA, such as promoting improved attendance and raising the achievement of looked after children and minority ethnic heritage pupils, have also improved significantly. The LEA has worked creatively with minority ethnic heritage communities at the local level of community leadership. This has developed a shared agenda and provides the basis for improved social cohesion.

75. Although not all service areas are equally effective, all are at least satisfactory. Schools are particularly appreciative of the way in which managers relate to them, and the ways in which they have been consulted. While progress has been rapid and can be sustained, some changes are not fully embedded and links between school improvement and social inclusion require greater coherence at the level of operational support and challenge to schools.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

76. Provision for children educated other than at school was poor but is now highly satisfactory. All excluded children now have access to full time education and collaborative work with schools has reduced the rate of exclusions significantly. The strategy for improving provision reflects the objectives set out in the community strategy and the aspiration for inclusive communities. A new priority is clearly articulated in the ESP and there are effective links with the strategy for 14-19 education and initiatives such as the Behaviour Improvement Programme. Elected members receive regular reports about exclusions. Additional staff and more focused procedures have enabled the LEA to be more effective in identifying and tracking those pupils who are out of school and also in securing speedy reintegration where this is appropriate. Although no formal system of managed moves has been agreed with schools, the arrangements that are in place are sufficient and effective.

77. The pupil referral unit (PRU) has undergone changes in management and organisation. This has enabled pupils' learning needs to be met more appropriately and a broader and more relevant curriculum has been introduced, particularly at key stages 3 and 4. The quality of provision at the PRU is beginning to be subject to the same rigorous monitoring as schools. However, these arrangements are not yet fully in place and plans to achieve this should be accelerated.

78. Provision for children educated other than at school is comprehensive. Better information is in place, in the form of an audit and analysis of future needs and any likely gaps. Staff work diligently to ensure that any barriers to children's participation in education are overcome and that there is a speedy return to education. There is guidance for schools reminding them of their duties to provide education and good systems are in place to check children are not missing from school. When necessary, senior officers are prepared to challenge schools over their practice. As a result, there is an increasing level of collaboration between schools and other agencies. Effective systems ensure that children educated at home receive an appropriate education. The LEA has improved access to home tuition to

meet the needs of those pupils who for medical reasons are unable to attend school. The costs of providing services to children out of school are comparable with that of other LEAs.

Recommendation

- Improve the monitoring of the PRU to assure the quality of teaching and learning.

Support for behaviour

79. Support for behaviour is now highly satisfactory. The LEA has worked effectively to improve the way in which schools and services provide support for behaviour. Permanent and fixed-term exclusions and referrals for support have significantly reduced. There is evidence of a changed attitude at school level which, linked with better LEA support, is now meeting pupils' needs largely without recourse to exclusion.

80. The ESP has updated the previous behaviour support plan. It provides a strategic framework for the support of behaviour across the LEA and in partnership with other agencies. There is now greater coherence between the SEN and behaviour strategies and an increasing emphasis on the identification and prevention of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Schools have a good understanding of how to access services. The model of intervention is rightly moving away from work with individual pupils towards consultancy and advice in order to bring about improvement.

81. National strategies in primary schools and at Key Stage 3 are starting to bring about change in schools. Links are also being made to complementary activities, such as the inclusion quality mark, anti-bullying work and the healthy schools programme. Schools are completing behaviour audits and relevant training is being provided. Developments like the behaviour education support team (BEST), although relatively recent, are drawing in support from a range of agencies so that schools have a wide menu from which they can request help.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

82. This function remains good. The LEA meets all of its statutory responsibilities for health, safety, welfare and child protection. In some areas, for example the support that schools receive for child protection, it offers excellent services which are highly regarded. Child protection procedures are comprehensive and have been well communicated to LEA and school staff. Child protection training is good and it is differentiated according to need, for example refresher courses are offered for those that need them. Schools therefore have a good understanding of the service thresholds that apply in cases of potential harm or neglect. Any uncertainty can be checked by referring to experienced and knowledgeable LEA staff.

83. Schools have good access to responsive advice and support for health and safety. Policies and guidance covering specific risk areas and risk assessment procedures are available, but regular training and monitoring to improve school health and safety work is less well developed.

Provision for looked after children

84. This area of the LEA's work remains highly satisfactory and good progress has been made in some aspects, particularly the achievement of looked after children. The ESP sets challenging targets for looked after children in accordance with those in the council's most recent LPSA, reflecting the council's high level of commitment to the support and wellbeing of these children and young people. Elected members receive regular and detailed reports about looked after children. They attend appropriate training seminars, visit children's homes, and are familiar with specific cases and the progress that children make. Children have opportunities to make their views known to members and action is taken in response, for example in the establishment of loan schemes for musical instruments and books.

85. There has been good progress in meeting targets for achievement. Significant improvements have been made at Key Stage 4, where the number of looked after children achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE has increased from 8.8% to 13.8% over the course of a year. Achievement for other age groups is either in line or slightly above national comparisons. However, the poor school attendance of a small number of looked after children remains a concern to the LEA. The underlying causes have been analysed and actions identified, including further support for carers, but the systems are not yet fully in place to secure the improvement necessary. Admissions to school are effectively managed and admissions criteria rightly give priority to looked after children.

86. Collaborative work between agencies is well developed, good liaison ensures information is shared effectively. Designated teachers are provided with good support and receive excellent guidance and advice on the completion of personal education plans (PEPs). As a result, their quality has improved. All looked after children have a PEP completed within the appropriate timescale, but reviews of PEPs are often delayed and this undermines their purpose.

Promoting racial equality

87. This function was previously unsatisfactory. However, good progress has been made; all the recommendations from the previous inspection have been carried out, and promoting race equality is now satisfactory. The policy for racial harassment has been sent to schools with a helpful set of practical guidelines to support teachers deal with incidents when they occur. Reports on the occurrence of racist incidents are now received from all schools. However, although the school improvement officers check the pattern of racist incidents in schools, the analysis does not interrogate the causes of incidents sufficiently. Incidents are not always pursued with enough rigour and reporting to governors does not adequately inform further action.

88. Sunderland is increasingly more culturally diverse and the council and the education directorate are firmly committed to promoting racial equality. The race equality policy is satisfactory and the council has achieved level 1 of the equalities standard. There is accurate data about the make up of Sunderland's minority ethnic communities. A joint visit to Bangladesh by officers and community representatives increased the LEA's awareness of the particular needs of the local Bangladeshi community and has done much to cement positive relationships. Relationships with the Sikh community are very cordial, but more could be done to include them directly at all levels of the LEA. Minority ethnic representation on working groups and committees is too low and opportunities to influence decisions about education in Sunderland are limited as a result. More needs to be done to increase the number of minority ethnic heritage school governors.

89. Initiatives have rightly focused on raising the attainment of Bangladeshi pupils and have had a positive impact. With the steady increase in numbers of asylum seekers and children of new workers, the LEA has made good use of Education Action Zone and EiC resources to provide additional support for those with English as an additional language, to organise welcome activities and support for asylum seekers, and to involve pupils in anti-racist projects. However, there is still more to be done. Insufficient attention has been paid to improving the achievement of the more able Sikh pupils.

Recommendations

- Improve the ratio of minority ethnic representatives on working groups, committees and governing bodies to reflect the increasing diversity of the city.
- Use the monitoring of racist incidents data rigorously to follow-up incidents and better inform the responses of schools and governors.

Appendix A

Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Sunderland Local Education Authority
LEA number:	394
Reporting Inspector:	Malcolm Wall
Date of Inspection:	January 2005

No	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Fieldwork*
	Context of the LEA		
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	6	
	Overall judgements		
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
0.2	Overall effectiveness of the LEA	3	
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	3	
	Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership		
1.1	The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people	2	
1.2	The implementation of corporate planning for education	3	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	2	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	2	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	3	
1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including	3	

	quality of advice)		
1.7	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	2	
1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	3	
1.9	Support for Early Years education	2	
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	3	
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	3	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	4	
2.3	The performance of schools	4	NF
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	3	
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	4	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	NF
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	2	NF
2.8	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	NF
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	NF
Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement			
3.1	Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement	3	

3.2	Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2	3	NF
3.3	Support for information and communication technology	2	NF
3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	4	
3.5	Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children	3	
3.6	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	4	
3.7	Support for school governors	3	NF
3.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	4	
3.9	The planning and provision of services to support school management	4	
3.9a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	2	
3.9b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	2	NF
3.9c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	5	
3.9d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	3	
3.10	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management	4	
3.11	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	3	
3.12	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	4	
Section 4: Support for special educational needs			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs	3	

4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	4	
Section 5: Support for social inclusion			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	3	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	3	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	NF
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	3	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	2	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	3	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	4	

**NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory; Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

Note: in the case of JRS 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and JRS 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparisons against national averages:

Grades 1-2: Well above; Grade 3: Above; Grade 4: In line; Grade 5: Below; Grades 6-7: Well below.

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

This inspection of Sunderland LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2003;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need;• the effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools;• the effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning;• the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools;• support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and |
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numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2;

- support for information and communication technology;
- support for school governors;
- the planning and provision of human resource services in supporting school management;
- support for school attendance.

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

Context of the LEA

The city of Sunderland is situated on the north-east coast of England. The city comprises a metropolitan area on the River Wear; the large new town of Washington; and a number of former coal mining areas separated by countryside. As at the time of the previous inspection, there are significant areas of severe deprivation. Eleven of the council's 25 wards are in the top half of the most deprived in England and Wales, and the city of Sunderland is the 22nd most deprived local authority in England. There are high levels of ill health. Regeneration and investment are bringing improvements and new facilities to the city, including the transformation of the city centre, new businesses, leisure facilities and pioneering housing schemes.

The overall population has declined since the previous inspection to around 279,000 and it is projected to continue to fall with an outward migration of people of working age, leading to an increasing proportion of older people living in the city. The minority ethnic proportion of the population is small but growing. The largest population group is Bangladeshi, mostly living in the east of the city.

The number of pupils on roll in maintained schools has declined by just over 3% from 48,640 in January 2002, to 47,028 in January 2004. The percentage of the school population of minority ethnic heritage is broadly in line with the national figure. The number of pupils from families who are asylum seekers and refugees has increased from 132 to 179 since the previous inspection.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free schools meals in maintained primary (28.3%) and secondary schools (17.7%) in 2003/04, is broadly in line with that of similar authorities, although the percentage for primary schools is above the national figure. The percentage of pupils of primary age in special schools (1.2%) with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average, although the percentage of pupils of secondary age (2.5%) is above.

Education provision is available for all three- and four-year-olds whose parents seek it, in nine maintained nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools and over 120 private, voluntary or independent settings. There are 84 primary schools, 7 special schools and 1 pupil referral unit. Of the 18 secondary schools, 15 are for pupils aged 11-16 and 3 Catholic schools with voluntary-aided status are for pupils aged 11-18. Mainstream post-16 education is mainly provided by the City of Sunderland College in a collaborative partnership with schools. Twelve of the 18 secondary schools have specialist status. There were eight beacon schools and there are now three schools with Leading Edge status and one Early Excellence Centre.

The performance of schools

Pupils' attainment in 2003 was generally in line with statistical neighbours and national averages at Key Stages 1 and 2. However, standards in mathematics dipped at Key Stage 1 and were below the national average. At Key Stage 2, provisional results for 2004 show that the percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 or above in mathematics and Level 5 or above in English are above those for similar authorities. The picture is very different at Key Stage 3 where pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science at Level 5 or above are below the national average, although in line with similar authorities. Provisional results for 2004 show that at Level 5 or above standards dipped in English and science, and improved in mathematics. At GCSE, standards are broadly in line with similar authorities but below national averages.

Improvement rates from 1999 to 2003 are above the national trends for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level. Improvement rates for all three core subjects at Key Stages 2 and 3 are broadly in line with national averages, with the exception of English at Key Stage 2. Provisional results for 2004 at Key Stage 2 show a marked improvement rate for all three core subjects. At Key Stage 1, improvement rates in reading and mathematics rose above that of the national averages; writing fell back but by less than the national figure. Pupils' progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 was in line with the national average in 2003, and better than the previous year. Pupils' progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 remained below the national average.

There are improvements in the performance of some underachieving groups. In 2003, the proportion of looked after children gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level was above the national average. The attainment of Bangladeshi heritage pupils in 2003 is below the national averages for most of the key stages, but 100% achieved five or more A* - G grade passes at GCSE and results for the higher grade passes have improved from 7% in 2002 to 35% according to the provisional results for 2004. Analysis by the LEA of provisional data for 2004 at Key Stage 2 shows boys' attainment is above that found in similar authorities in English and mathematics at Level 4 or above, and in all core subjects for the higher levels.

Ofsted data show that the percentage of good and very good secondary schools (64.7%) is above similar authorities (57.8%) but below the national figure (68.9%).

For primary schools, the percentage of good and very good schools (85.9%) was well above the figures for both national and similar authorities. The number of schools below the Government's expected minimum achievement levels at Key Stage 2 continues to fall and is broadly in line with the national average. All secondary schools are meeting the expected minimum achievement level for 5 A* - C grades at GCSE.

Attendance levels are in line with the national average in primary schools but below average in the secondary phase. In 2002/03, unauthorised absences were below the national average in primary schools and in line in secondary schools. Permanent exclusions have reduced significantly and were very low in 2003/04 (six).

In 2003, the LEA missed its targets at Key Stages 2 and 3. There have been significant gaps between the LEA and schools' aggregated targets. The target-setting process has improved in 2004/05 and is now more securely based on pupils' prior attainment. The LEA narrowly missed its target for five or more higher grade passes and exceeded the target for five or more A* to G grades.

Staying on rates into full-time education are below the national average but they are rising. However, when work-based training is taken into account Sunderland's staying on rate is above the national average.

Funding data for the LEA

Schools budget	Sunderland	Statistical neighbours average	Metropolitan Average	England Average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2,939	2,774	2,812	2,900
Standards fund delegated	66	54	62	63
Excellence in Cities	58	63	54	35
Schools in financial difficulty	2	7	4	4
Education for under fives (non- ISB)	56	61	50	85
Strategic management	13	36	34	30
Special education needs	56	124	118	126
Grants	32	36	31	26
Access	37	59	56	60
Capital expenditure from revenue	11	19	19	24
Total schools budget	3,270	3,232	3,239	3,354
Schools formula spending share	3,038	3,066	3,066	3,197

Source: *DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05*

LEA budget	Sunderland	Statistical neighbours average	Metropolitan average	England average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	167	131	119	99
Specific Grants	11	10	11	14
Special educational needs	35	28	27	36
School improvement	43	34	36	38
Access	83	95	108	142
Capital expenditure from revenue	3	0	1	2
Youth and Community	80	78	77	75
Total LEA budget	420	376	379	406

Source: *DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05*

All figures are net. Average quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average

Notes