

Moving Towards Excellence

How we performed in the 2004 Inspection



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) visited and inspected Portsmouth Local Education Authority (LEA) in May 2004 and made the following comments:

“Portsmouth has made good progress since the previous inspection and is now a highly satisfactory and effective local education authority (LEA) with good capacity for further improvement.”

“Leadership is exceptionally strong. Both elected members and senior officers demonstrate a high level of commitment and an understanding of what needs to be done to bring about improvement.”

“The LEA knows itself well, as its self-evaluation demonstrates. Schools value the level of good consultation, honesty and partnership of senior officers and also the commitment of elected members.”

Ofsted identified 26 individual areas of particular strength in the way in which the LEA meets its responsibilities to the City of Portsmouth.

Each of these areas was judged to be either good or very good (Grade 1 or 2):

CORPORATE STRATEGY AND LEA LEADERSHIP

- **The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people**
The LEA's corporate planning is now very good and its implementation good. These functions have improved since the previous inspection through strong leadership by members and senior officers, better cross-departmental working, and effective monitoring and scrutiny. Capacity for improvement is good.
- **The implementation of corporate planning for education**
The council's corporate plans give high priority to education, and emphasise raising pupils' attainment. Leadership is exceptionally strong. Both elected members and senior officers demonstrate a high level of commitment and an understanding of what needs to be done to bring about improvement. Relative roles and responsibilities of members and officers are clear. Both groups make considerable efforts to get to know their schools well and seek the views of headteachers and governors.
- **The effectiveness of LEA decision making**
Decision making is good. Elected members do not shy away from taking unpopular decisions on issues such as school closures, if they conclude that action is in the best interests of the pupils concerned.
- **The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities**
A high priority is given to education and resources are allocated flexibly to support changing priorities. For example, in 2003-4, additional resources were allocated to priorities such as attendance, school improvement, and ICT in schools.
- **The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value**
Since the last inspection, the council has introduced a performance management system for education which uses national and local performance indicators as well as service objectives and targets. Systematic monitoring arrangements involve members and allow an appropriate focus on areas of underperformance, and agreement of targets and recovery strategies..
- **The leadership provided by elected members (including the quality of advice provided by senior officers)**
The leadership of elected members is now very good. It has improved considerably since the last inspection, when it was poor. An Executive and scrutiny model of governance is now in place, which makes for greater clarity in decision-making. The current group of members has set a very clear vision for educational improvement, which is fully supported by all three political parties. There is continuity in policy-making, which is a considerable achievement in a council with a minority administration and a history of changes of control. Senior officers have effective working relationships with elected members.
- **The quality of leadership provided by senior officers**
Education is well led and reflects the strong strategic capability of the Director. Leadership provided by the senior officers, including the Chief Executive is good. The ongoing challenge to all its schools is good. The quality and consistency of their very effective team work together with the work of the link advisers, subject consultants and service managers are impressive.

- **The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities**
The council and the education department see partnership work as the cornerstone of their drive to raise aspirations and achievement across the city. This has led to improved attendance, enhanced the achievement of looked after children, supported the development of extended schools and the establishment of the Children's Trust.
- **Support for Early Years education**
The early years team is highly regarded and there are strong, effective partnerships across the sectors. Training and support to encourage good provision are major priorities, and there is a carefully planned programme to maximise opportunities for children at risk of under-achieving. Early years provision is a high priority for the council and this enables effective implementation of strategies.

STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

- **The LEA's strategy for school improvement**
The good strategy for school improvement has established a clear direction for education that reflects national and local priorities. This is a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection when it was satisfactory. Recommendations from the last report and the action plan activities have been acted upon and good progress has been made. The capacity for further improvement is good.
- **The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement**
Implementation of the strategy is good and standards are rising. The clear priorities and good planning target resources and grant funding to schools effectively through individual and area-based initiatives.
- **The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data**
Link advisers are well regarded by schools. The challenge they offer is good and schools welcome the consistent focus on improving pupils' performance through better informed use of the performance data.
- **The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools**
The LEA has sharply focused its support to those schools causing concern and effective systems of support have resulted in the reduction of the number of schools in this category.
- **The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning**
The asset management process is clearly linked to the LEA's other major plans, such as school organisation. All schools have asset management plans and these are used sensibly to bring about school improvement.
- **The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools**
This was highly satisfactory in the last inspection and the service is now good. A coordinated admissions system for secondary schools introduced in 2004 was a year ahead of statutory requirements.

SUPPORT TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, INCLUDING SCHOOLS' EFFORTS TO SUPPORT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- **Support for information and communication technology**
Support for this area is good. This is good progress since the last inspection, when it was unsatisfactory. There is a clear strategy which links ICT use across both services for schools and curriculum support. A number of good initiatives have driven the development of ICT use in the curriculum.
- **Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including gypsy/traveller children**
This judgement was not subject to fieldwork. The service was judged to be very good.
- **Support for school governors**
Support to governors is good. Governors have a strong influence and involvement in driving educational policy in the city. The Governor Support Service has the capacity to respond at short notice to needs in specific schools. The quality of training is good and includes accredited training for clerks.

- **The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management**
Officers monitor budgets rigorously and have a very detailed knowledge of individual schools. Although half of the secondary schools have long standing budget deficits, decisive action has been taken to improve the position.
- **The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management**
Property services are good. Capital projects are completed on time, well managed and with minimum disruption to the schools. Schools are fully involved in the development of major projects. There are good arrangements for responding to emergencies and these have proved effective.
- **The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management**
The information management service is good. Links between the corporately provided ICT support for school management and the advisory service ICT curriculum support are effective and schools can operate well-integrated systems.

SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

- **The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN**
The LEA's fulfilment of its statutory obligations in SEN is good. Guidance for parents about the procedures to support them if they have a child with SEN is clear and produced in the main ethnic minority languages as well as English.
- **The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money**
Value for money remains good. There is tight monitoring of SEN budgets at LEA level, and for each school. The LEA delegates at a high level for pupils with SEN (but without a statement) and this reflects the LEA's commitment to both inclusion and delegation. Recent Ofsted inspections show that pupils with SEN make good or very good progress in over 90% of schools inspected. The majority of the LEA's special schools were good when last inspected. The LEA has a good capacity to improve this function further.

SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

- **Support for school attendance**
Support for attendance is very good and the recommendation in the last report has been met. The education welfare service has developed a number of specific initiatives, particularly for primary schools, such as role play workshops and these have had a positive impact. Good guidance on improving attendance is made available to all schools.
- **Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection**
The LEA's work in this area is good. Since the last inspection the area child protection committee guidelines have been re-issued and are under review again. There is good LEA guidance to schools that is based on, and supplements, these area guidelines.
- **Provision for looked after children**
This remains good. Challenging targets are set for these children's academic attainment and attendance, and, broadly, the LEA is on track to achieve them. There is weekly monitoring of, for example, attendance and plans are set up for young people at risk of underachieving, or those absent from school. Regular reports are made to elected members enabling them to develop a good overview of the progress of children for whom they are corporate parents and there is a strong commitment to fulfilling that role effectively from both members and officers.

A further 18 areas were judged to be highly satisfactory and 3 areas were judged to be satisfactory.

The 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.

OFSTED JUDGED THE LEA TO HAVE NO UNSATISFACTORY AREAS OF PERFORMANCE and THERE ARE NO KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no key recommendations in the report.

The LEA will now address 6 areas for further development.

School places: improve value for money by drawing up a clear medium term strategy to remove surplus primary school places.

School leadership and management: monitor the impact of initiatives on the performance of all groups of pupils in order to evaluate more accurately the quality of LEA support to schools to raise standards.

Gifted and talented: set up a central register and agree with schools the criteria for the identification of gifted and talented pupils.

Strategy for SEN: ensure that schools are convinced of and committed to the strategy for SEN within a social inclusion policy for all schools.

Functions to support school improvement: improve the support for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools by developing further materials to help schools to evaluate their own provision.

Behaviour: improve behaviour support in secondary schools.

