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ANNEX B

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OFSTED praises the ‘significant improvement’ in Leicester City LEA – a dramatic turnaround in education

LEICESTER CITY IS a much-improved local education authority according to a report published today by OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education).

Commenting on all aspects of the local authority’s education work, the report concludes that ‘a most significant improvement’ has been achieved since its initial inspection in July 1999. Inspectors spent several weeks in January 2001 looking at the council’s education department and how head teachers, governors and other interested parties saw its work.

Greatest praise was shown for the much-improved leadership within the department. The inspection team commended the vision of the council’s elected members and the chief executive and the renewed emphasis given to education within the priorities of the council.

Speaking today, the cabinet lead member for education, Councillor Farook Subedar commented: “This is a real vote of confidence in the work of the local education authority. We are so pleased that our commitment to raising standards, improving services and supporting schools and young people has been recognised.

“The report recognises our unambiguous and continuing commitment to increased funding for schools. I would like to pay tribute to the many individuals whose untiring efforts have helped to build a strong and improving education service. We are determined to provide the best education for the children and young people of Leicester. This report strengthens our resolve to improve further.”

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The report highlights a number of areas where the LEA is performing well, including:

- *support to schools in the use of performance data*
- *support to schools causing concern*
- *decision-making on education by elected members and the advice they are given by officers*
- *the leadership given by senior officers*
- *support to literacy*
- *support to numeracy in primary schools*
- *financial services*
- *personnel services*

It also highlights areas where the authority still has work to do, including:

- *strategic planning for special educational needs*
- *building partnerships with local communities*
- *liaison with social services at school level*
- *support for pupils educated otherwise than at school*
- *measures to combat racism*
- *ICT in the curriculum*
- *payroll and property services*

Strategic leadership is commended throughout the report. Inspectors identified the strength of partnership between the LEA and schools and the clear support of the Leicester Partnership Board to achieve an improved service. Professor David Hopkins, chair of the Leicester Partnership Board said: "We have achieved much in a very short time. The partnership board has established new and positive working relationships with schools, parents and the department for education and employment and the council. We have focused on the key priorities of raising aspirations and attainment and provided clear support to schools to help them achieve challenging targets for improvement."

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'Effective and purposeful leadership is now provided by the recently appointed director of education Steven Andrews.' The report praises the significant progress made since his appointment in May 2000.

Leader of the council, councillor Ross Willmott commented today: "The appointment of the new director was a vital step in restoring confidence and capability in the education department. We chose wisely.

"Working closely with Farook Subedar, Steven has created a real partnership between the department and schools. We are all clear about the priorities we face. Schools have greater confidence in the ability of the department to deliver the services they need. But overall, Steven has acted swiftly and resolutely to secure the improvements required. We continue to benefit greatly from his professional commitment to securing the best for Leicester's children and young people."

Over the last six months the LEA has been re-organised extensively to improve the quality of support to schools. Ranging from a new cabinet structure in the council to a new face to face standards and effectiveness unit to support school improvement, these radical changes has resulted in swift improvement in schools.

"When I was appointed I knew that we faced a real challenge", commented Steven Andrews, director of education. "That we have achieved so much in such a short time is a testament to real partnership. I would like to acknowledge also the personal support offered to Leicester by David Hopkins and the work of the partnership board.

"I would also like to draw attention to the tremendous support we have had from the DfEE and, in particular, the confidence shown by the Minister of State for Education, Estelle Morris throughout our recovery. They have all helped to create the confidence we needed to act so radically".

"None of this could have been achieved without the dedication and hard work of head teachers, teachers and support staff, governors and, of course, our pupils."

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Pupils in Leicester schools now make better progress than the national average. Schools are improving at a faster rate and there are now very few schools causing concern. The report notes these significant improvements. The LEA is credited with raising expectations and setting new standards for schools. The impact has been improved teaching and improved leadership and management in schools across the LEA.

“We have seen a real difference over the past year”, commented Jane Collins, Chair of Leicester City Secondary Headteachers’ Association.

“We now have a clear vision of the LEA’s priorities and greater confidence in the support which schools can expect from the LEA”. Her comments were echoed by Sally Morrison on behalf of primary schools and David Bateson from special schools.

“We are not complacent,” said Steven Andrews. “We know we have a lot of work to do until we have a service of which we can all be truly proud. But we are now building on a very firm and secure base. We will ensure that we continually focus on what matters and that has to be the highest levels of individual achievement for boys and girls in our schools. This report has given us renewed confidence in the direction we are going and confirms our ability to make a difference. We will continue to do so.”

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