



Office for Standards
in Education

Worcestershire

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: January 2004

Reporting Inspector: Kevin Jane HMI



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Contents

	Page
Basic information	
Summary	5
Introduction	5
Main findings	6
Recommendations	7
Section 1: Corporate leadership of education	8
Summary table of judgements	8
Corporate planning for education and its implementation	8
Decision-making	9
Targeting of resources	10
Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	10
Strategic partnerships	10
Support for Early Years	11
Support for 14 – 19 education	12
The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	12
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation	13
Summary table of judgements	13
The strategy for school improvement and its implementation	13
The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	14
The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	15

Effectiveness of the LEA’s identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools	15
Supply and quality of teachers	16
Providing school places	17
Section 3: Support to improve education in schools	18
Summary table of judgements	18
Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement	18
Support for information and communication technology (ICT)	19
Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3	20
Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children	20
Support for school governors	21
Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management	21
Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement	22
Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)	23
Summary table of judgements	23
The strategy for SEN	23
Statutory obligations	24
SEN functions to support school improvement	25
Value for money	25
Section 5: Support for social inclusion	27
Summary table of judgements	27
The LEA’s strategy for social inclusion	27

Provision for pupils educated other than at school	28
Support for behaviour	29
Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	29
Provision for looked after children	30
Promoting racial equality	30
Appendix A: Record of Judgement Recording Statements	32
Appendix B	
Context of the inspection	36
Context of the LEA	38
The performance of schools	39
The LEA's EDP targets for school improvement	40

Basic information

Name of LEA:	Worcestershire Local Education Authority
LEA number:	402
Address of LEA:	Worcestershire County council County Hall Spetchley Road Worcester WR5 2NP
Reporting Inspector:	Kevin Jane HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2004

Summary

Introduction

Worcestershire is a mainly rural county with six towns in addition to the city of Worcester. It is a relatively affluent county although there are pockets of deprivation. Unemployment is lower than the national average but there are few large employers in the area. The school age population, at 79,726, has remained stable over the last few years but it is slightly lower than at the time of the previous inspection.

Standards of attainment in the schools are generally in line with national averages and those in similar authorities.¹ There has been improvement over the last four years in Key Stages 1 to 3 and for higher attaining pupils at GCSE. Progress for lower attaining pupils at GCSE has been more uneven. The LEA fell short of its targets for 2002 in Key Stage 2 by some margin and will therefore require a much greater rate of improvement if the targets are to be met for 2004. In Key Stage 4 the LEA exceeded its targets in 2002.

Since the previous inspection, there have been some significant changes within both the council and the education services directorate. Following local elections in 2001, the council is controlled by a minority Conservative administration and the business of the council is governed by a leader and cabinet model. The education services directorate was restructured in 2002 to improve service delivery, including providing challenge and intervention in schools, and to increase the LEA's capacity to deliver corporate objectives.

¹ **Worcestershire LEA's statistical neighbours are:**Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, West Sussex, Warwickshire, Cheshire, Gloucestershire, East Riding of Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Bedfordshire, Shropshire

Main findings

Summary: Worcestershire local education authority (LEA) knows its strengths and weaknesses well. The council has made education its top priority and is ambitious in its objectives and planning. This, together with good political and officer leadership in education and well-established partnership arrangements, has resulted in good progress since the last inspection and strengthened the overall effectiveness of the LEA. There is a sense of common purpose between schools, education services and the council in improving standards and the quality of education for children and young people in the county. The majority of functions and services are performed to a good or very good standard and all functions are performed to an at least satisfactory standard. The overall effectiveness of the LEA is good and there are no significant weaknesses. The prospects for further improvement are very promising.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/ for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The priority given to education and related levels of spending on education • The clarity, coherence and implementation of plans • The good leadership by elected members and officers and very good partnership work • The effectiveness of asset management planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenge to schools carrying significant surplus balances
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clarity of the school improvement strategy and its implementation • The focusing of work on areas of need and the use of performance data • The support for the recruitment and retention of teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The precision of early warning systems for detecting underperformance • The uneven progress towards targets
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support for ICT • The effectiveness, planning and provision of services to support school improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advice and guidance to support schools in procuring services
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategic plan for social inclusion, including SEN • The progress of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations • The effectiveness of links between support for SEN and school improvement services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The completion rates for statutory assessment within required timescales • The rigour with which the progress of individual pupils with SEN is evaluated
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision for pupils educated other than at school. • The support for behaviour • The support for health, safety, welfare and child protection • The provision for looked after children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspects of support for schools in combating racism and promoting racial equality

Recommendations

Key Recommendations:

There are no key recommendations.

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

Targeting of resources: the LEA should provide more robust challenge to all schools with budget surpluses of 5% or over, to satisfy itself that these resources are to be used for the benefit of current pupils.

Strategy for education and its implementation

Identification of, and intervention in, under-performing schools: act upon the information from early warning systems more robustly and decisively to prevent schools falling into serious weaknesses or special measures designations.

Support to improve education in schools

Support for the national initiatives at Key Stage 3: ensure that systems for regular evaluation and reporting by consultants and the strategy manager identify the effect on pupils' attainment and progress in Key Stage 3.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management:

- Provide published lists of alternative providers for all services.
- Reflect clearly in guidance materials and training how Best Value principles and practice apply in the context of schools.

Support for special educational needs

Statutory obligations:

- With health and social services, secure agreed protocols and monitoring systems to increase the proportion of statements of SEN completed within expected timescales.
- Implement an auditing and monitoring programme for all schools to ensure better value for money for SEN.

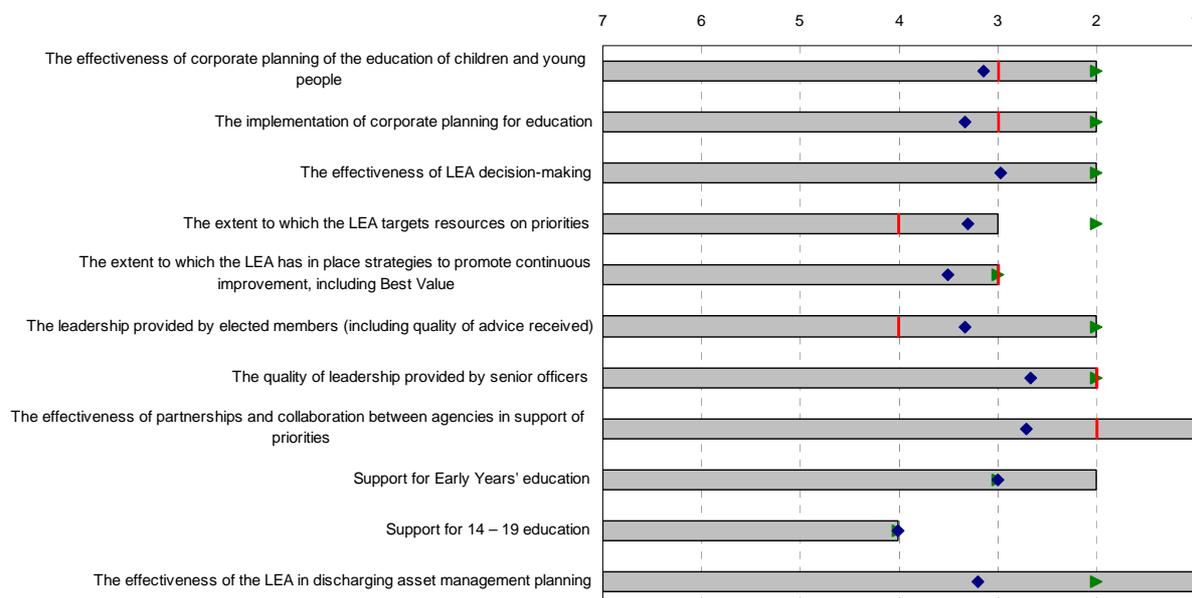
Support for social inclusion

Promoting racial equality:

- Ensure that representatives from all schools attend appropriate training on a regular basis to improve work in promoting racial equality and in combating racism.
- Ensure that all schools submit regular returns showing whether or not any racist incidents or alleged incidents have occurred.

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. At the time of the previous inspection, Worcestershire was a new LEA and had made a good start in developing corporate planning. Since then, there have been changes in political administration, the education services directorate has been restructured and expanded, and the council has adopted a leader and cabinet model of governance. These factors have not deflected the council or the work of the education services directorate. Indeed, strategic and operational working have been strengthened. Therefore, significant progress has been made overall and the effectiveness of corporate planning for education and its implementation remain good.

2. The council has established a new corporate vision '*Progress to Excellence*', which is securely linked to the Worcestershire community strategy. Education has the highest priority within corporate objectives. In the context of a minority Conservative administration, there is secure cross-party commitment to education. This contributes significantly to determining priorities for development and decision-making. Elected members, senior officers and schools share a common purpose in raising standards and improving the quality of education in Worcestershire's schools.

3. The clarity, coherence and implementation of corporate planning are good. The community strategy and corporate plan, together with the Best Value Performance Plan, are

linked well to, and directly inform, the strategic plans of the education services directorate. These, in turn, inform service plans and the performance plans of individuals within the directorate. Aligned to this is the medium-term financial plan that has been developed to ensure affordability, feasibility and match to priorities. The council has successfully directed available resources to meet its priority for education and it takes a careful approach to budget management.

4. The monitoring of progress is formal, regular and robust and the LEA has developed a secure culture of self-evaluation. The effect of this is demonstrated in the close match of the findings of this inspection with the LEA's own self-evaluation and with the outcomes of the most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment that, in December 2003, judged the council to be good overall for its performance, progress and capacity to sustain improvement.

5. Leadership by elected members responsible for education is good. They are knowledgeable and committed, well-informed and visible among schools. Senior and other officers provide good leadership and are committed to partnership work, which is a particular strength of the LEA. The LEA has secured the trust and confidence of schools, which, in turn, play an important role in the development of policy and in the monitoring and evaluation of the progress made.

6. There is scope, nevertheless, for further improvement. The evaluation of school performance shows that progress has been uneven. Scrutiny functions have improved, but require further precision and challenge. The strategy for 14-19 education is still at the consultation stage of development, although partnership arrangements in this area are good. There has been limited challenge to those schools with significant, surplus budgets and the LEA has recognised the need to develop, with schools, better guidance and approaches to applying Best Value principles and best practice in procurement. Nevertheless, the quality of educational leadership and the commitment to continuous improvement mean that there is good capacity within the education services directorate to address these areas.

Decision-making

7. The effectiveness of decision-making continues to be good. The council has demonstrated its capacity and willingness to take difficult decisions such as those on school place planning, restructuring the education services directorate and revising funding arrangements for schools. Decisions are taken in a timely way; they are transparent and focused on improving service quality and efficiency. Officers provide good advice to elected members, allowing options and implications to be considered. For example, following an analysis of standards and quality in the Wyre Forest district, a decision was made to bring forward this area review ahead of the original schedule.

8. Decision-making is strengthened by the cross-party agreement that exists to ensure priorities are delivered in line with the corporate plan. A further strength is the very good relationship between senior officers and elected members responsible for education. Elected members are knowledgeable and committed to improving the quality of education. Information exchange is frequent and broad in scope. Consultation arrangements are effective and result in a measured and systematic approach to decision-making, particularly where sensitive issues arise. Routine decision-making is based on a clear understanding of

delegated procedures. Although the quality of scrutiny has improved, there is scope for improving the precision and challenge in this area.

Targeting of resources

9. The LEA's ability to target resources to priorities has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the council's medium-term financial strategy and budget monitoring arrangements, and on surplus balances in schools. A clear medium-term financial strategic framework is in place, ensuring that resources are suitably targeted and confirming the high priority given to education. The council's approach to budget management is appropriately prudent and overspends are rare.

10. The LEA has placed more emphasis on avoiding deficits in school budgets than on managing surpluses. As a result, the challenge to schools with high budget surpluses lacks rigour. Consequently, in 2002-03, 70% of all schools had unspent surpluses of 5% or more. The LEA has focused its challenge on schools with surpluses of 10% or more, with only limited questioning of surpluses between 5% and 10%. Although the decline in surpluses noted in 2002-03 is predicted to continue in 2003-04, the overall levels remain high. The LEA cannot be confident that surpluses are used for the benefit of current pupils and not simply stockpiled for future eventualities.

Recommendation

- The LEA should provide more robust challenge to all schools with budget surpluses of 5% or over, to satisfy itself that these resources are used for the benefit of current pupils.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

11. This aspect was subject to highly differentiated fieldwork that focused on the LEA's approach to procurement and Best Value. The LEA's approach to procurement remains highly satisfactory. The council's Best Value Performance Plan received unqualified approval by the external auditor. The process for achieving Best Value is rigorous and challenging and is a key component of the corporate planning framework. A procurement officer has recently been appointed and has met headteachers to assess their needs. However, the LEA's guidance on best practice in procurement is not easily accessible to schools and officers plan to produce specialist advice in due course.

Strategic partnerships

12. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has maintained its commitment to partnership work and its performance in this area is now very good. The council takes a strong lead through the corporate plan and community strategy in promoting partnership and collaboration as means of improving service delivery and meeting the wider ambitions for children and young people in Worcestershire.

13. The LEA has taken care to ensure that strategic and operational partnerships are aligned to the priorities and actions of the education services directorate. Generally, there is a very good understanding among the partnership groups of the key priorities related to raising

standards, improving school effectiveness and promoting social inclusion. Key groups work to clear terms of reference, action plans, monitoring and evaluation arrangements. These components are well-established in securing effective partnership work in Worcestershire. Partners welcome the LEA's approach to building capacity for improvement, avoiding unnecessary duplication of actions and making best use of expertise and resources. There is particularly effective work with the Learning Partnership, the Connexions service, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Quality Protects, the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Children's and Young Peoples' Strategic Partnership. In addition, there are mature and constructive relationships with diocesan partners and the professional associations. The LEA is equally committed to building partnerships with schools, which welcome, particularly, the numerous opportunities to engage in policy development and monitoring and evaluation arrangements through the director's development groups.

14. The LEA takes a lead role in monitoring the progress of partnership work and reporting outcomes to elected members. There is clear evidence of improvements at an operational level in particular. For example, partnership with the Learning and Skills Council, further education colleges, high schools and training providers is resulting in a more flexible and improved curriculum at Key Stage 4 and is contributing to a reduction in the number of pupil exclusions. Similarly, inter-agency and directorate partnerships secure better outcomes for pupils who are looked after by the local authority and effective partnerships in support of early years' education have resulted in targets being exceeded for places for three-year-olds.

Support for Early Years

15. Support for early years' education was not fully inspected previously, although comments in that report related to the planning and support for providers and partners were positive. Since that time, good progress has been made and the effectiveness of support in this area is good.

16. The strategy for supporting early years' education, set out in the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan (EYDCP) and in the Education Development Plan (EDP2), are aligned well and stem from corporate priorities. These plans are informed by good data and are suitably focused on raising standards and improving the overall quality of provision for pupils in maintained and non-maintained settings. Plans are ambitious, but achievable, and funding to support action plans is deployed effectively.

17. The EYDCP is effective at both strategic and operational levels and benefits from good officer leadership and secure partnership arrangements. Parents and families, for example, have access to comprehensive information, advice and support. Relationships within the partnership are particularly effective and respective roles and responsibilities are clearly understood.

18. Support for early years' practitioners is good. The partnership publishes a comprehensive training programme that is based on a secure evaluation of needs and is offered to all practitioners. Mentor teachers provide good support to non-maintained settings. Robust monitoring procedures establish the requirement for intervention, which is then targeted well to meet needs. This has resulted in generally good provision in all settings.

Support for 14–19 education

19. This inspection confirms the LEA's self-evaluation that support for 14-19 education is satisfactory. The LEA is taking a measured and systematic approach to the development of a coherent and ambitious strategy. The plan is currently the subject of consultation and early responses demonstrate broad agreement among schools and other stakeholders to the principles and actions. The timeline for publication of the plan is well structured and includes appropriate milestones for consultation, further revision and council approval. The plan is scheduled for wider publication after April 2004.

20. Underpinning the proposals are strong partnership arrangements. Relationships, strategic and operational, with the local LSC, the Connexions service, training providers, schools and further education are productive and there is secure understanding of the vision and ambition for 14–19 education in Worcestershire. Partnership arrangements also contribute to joint planning arrangements and coherence in provision.

21. The strategy for 14–19 education stems from a range of sources, including EDP2, the corporate plan, the education services directorate strategic plan and the strategic objectives of key partners. It is informed by a comprehensive pupil level database and sets out a realistic vision based on entitlements and opportunities for young people. It is, nevertheless, at an early stage of development. Ofsted data currently confirm the quality of Key Stage 4 and post-16 provision to be above national and similar LEAs' averages for the quality of teaching, leadership and management and curriculum provision. The proportion of pupils achieving higher grades at GCSE is broadly in line with national and similar LEAs' averages but it is below average for lower-attaining pupils. The LEA has exceeded its targets in EDP2 against both measures and the gap between the achievements of boys and girls has narrowed. Nevertheless, a greater rate of improvement will be necessary if the challenging local public service agreement (LPSA) targets are to be achieved.

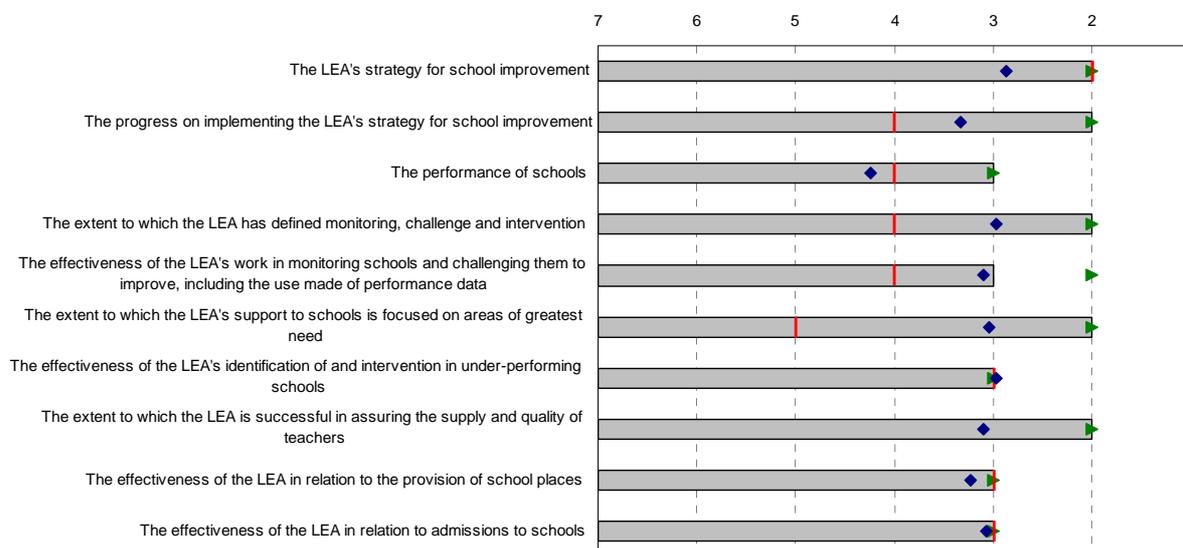
22. The capacity for further improvement is very promising. The provision of an inspector post for 14–19 education funded jointly between the local LSC and the LEA, the partnership arrangements and the commitment of the council and schools to proposals and initiatives already in hand should realise the ambition the LEA has set for itself.

The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning

23. The LEA's performance in this area is very good. Fieldwork during the inspection focused on the LEA's achievement in relation to value for money; knowledge of schools' use of their own repairs and maintenance resources; and the linkage between different elements of asset management planning including Public Private Partnerships and Public Finance Initiatives (PPP/PFI). The LEA has good quality information about school buildings and works closely with schools to prioritise needs and draw up appropriate programmes. Schools' and the LEA's resources are used in a coherent, cost-effective way to further school improvement and there are clear links with the council's corporate asset management process. The LEA uses a range of funding sources, including PPP/PFI, flexibly and creatively.

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

24. The LEA's strategy for school improvement and its implementation are good and demonstrate significant progress since the previous inspection. Raising standards of achievement and improving the quality of education in schools and other settings are common aims across the services of the education directorate and are suitably informed by the priorities in the corporate plan for Worcestershire.

25. As at the previous inspection, the LEA's strategy for school improvement is good. National and local priorities are clearly defined and are informed by a detailed audit based on a wide range of relevant data. This provides a firm foundation for actions that are determined by recognition of strengths and weaknesses. There is also a logical development of the work begun during the lifetime of EDP1. The LEA has been particularly successful in tailoring the expectations of the national priorities for Key Stages 1 to 3 to the complex structure of schools in the county. Following good consultation with its schools, the LEA has produced a clear overview, which provides a succinct and useful working document for officers and schools alike. This overview successfully integrates national and local priorities with four cross-cutting strands of development so that it is transparent how the priorities and strands inter-relate and who takes the lead responsibility for implementation. Plans for school improvement, special educational needs and social inclusion are linked coherently. Schools, in particular, welcome this clarity and generally acknowledge the high degree of relevance of the LEA's priorities to their own school improvement plans.

26. Actions plans are costed accurately, and in line with strategic budget-setting processes. Statutory and other targets are based on a thorough and accurate analysis. Over the last three years, there has been a close correlation between targets set by the LEA and the aggregated targets agreed between the LEA and its schools at all key stages. However, although there has been progress overall, actual attainment has fallen short of the targets over the last two years on all measures except that for lower-attaining pupils at Key Stage 4, where targets have been exceeded. The targets are challenging and a greater rate of progress than is currently taking place will be required if the LEA is to meet them in 2004 and the stretch targets in the LPSA.

27. The school improvement strategy is monitored and evaluated termly and annual plans are suitably revised. There are effective arrangements for informing elected members, schools and other stakeholders on the progress of the plans. Overall, the strategy is implemented to the timescale specified and evaluations are made against identified success criteria and outcome measures. The plan complies fully with the code of practice for LEA-school relationships.

28. The LEA is ambitious and has pursued the recommendations identified in the last report with determination. In particular, the education services directorate has successfully established its programme of support and intervention to target the schools that are most in need. Underpinning this improvement is the clarity of the definitions and criteria that categorise schools according to their performance and effectiveness. Support and intervention are suitably differentiated and widely understood by schools. Contact with schools is monitored rigorously and across all services to ensure the efficient and effective deployment of the LEA's resources and expertise.

29. The LEA has highly satisfactory monitoring arrangements and, as a result, knows its schools well. However, the LEA's response to its early warning systems has been insufficiently robust to prevent a small minority of schools being judged by Ofsted to have serious weaknesses or require special measures. The LEA has been partially successful in establishing a climate in which schools are expected to be autonomous. It can, therefore, build on the good relationships and trust that it has with headteachers and governors to take more decisive action when required. It is also well placed to accelerate its work on brokering external support and encourage all schools, but particularly primary schools, to be more confident when purchasing support for themselves.

30. Although the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places is highly satisfactory, further work is needed to reduce the number of unfilled places in the primary sector. The LEA's work in assuring the quality and supply of teachers is a strength. It has been very successful in reducing teacher vacancies over the last few years and is now consolidating its position, promoting opportunities for career development in Worcestershire and remodelling to prepare for the workforce reforms.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data

31. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now highly satisfactory. The LEA monitors the performance of its schools systematically and mostly knows their strengths

and weaknesses. Although the LEA still has concerns about a significant number of its schools, relatively few are subject to formal Ofsted designations and those in the LEA category of concern receive appropriately differentiated support.

32. The key improvement has been in the use of data. The LEA draws a wealth of performance data and management information from all services and uses this effectively to challenge schools that are underperforming. Schools appreciate the range of comparative benchmarking information that the LEA now provides and they use this and other data more confidently. This support for schools in their own self-evaluation has enabled them to set more ambitious targets. Nevertheless, schools' progress towards achieving these targets has been uneven.

33. In spring 2003, the LEA increased the level of challenge to improve the quality of school self-evaluation, a recommendation in the last inspection report. An audit has just been completed to establish where practice is good and where further improvement is required. Through their monitoring visits, inspectors have challenged schools to produce evidence to justify their self-evaluation. This is a good development, if a little overdue. The expectation that chairs of governors will be involved in all LEA monitoring visits also supports the LEA's determination to improve the quality of leadership and management in its schools. Records of all monitoring visits are routinely circulated to headteachers and governors. However, the LEA acknowledges that some of the notes of visits could be more precise. They do not always identify time limits for action or state recommendations that ensure the school takes responsibility for its own improvement.

The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need

34. This aspect of the LEA's work was unsatisfactory at the previous inspection. The LEA has made very good progress and it is now good. The LEA has implemented fully the expectations of the Code of Practice on LEA-school relationships. The principle of support in inverse proportion to success is clearly understood by schools and consistently applied by all support services.

35. The rationale and criteria for categorising schools according to their effectiveness are good. The categorisation is based on a thorough analysis of performance data and makes productive use of information that the LEA has gathered from a variety of sources. The criteria ensure that potential risks are, for the most part, identified effectively, making distinctions, for example, between the needs of new headteachers and deputy headteachers, schools facing challenging circumstances, and the support schools need to come out of special measures or serious weaknesses. The system has the potential to be very good and is under constant review with schools, in order to reflect a more sophisticated range of needs and to incorporate plans to disseminate the most effective practice.

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

36. The LEA's work in this function is highly satisfactory. It has relatively few schools identified by Ofsted as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures, as was the position at the time of the last inspection. The numbers of schools in formal Ofsted

categories rose following the last inspection, but has decreased over the last two years. At the time of this inspection, there are four schools identified as requiring special measures and six with serious weaknesses including one with an inadequate sixth form.

37. With better data analysis and skilled inspection and advice, the LEA is becoming increasingly good at anticipating potential risk and supporting schools that are underperforming. Headteachers confirm that the LEA knows their schools well. The LEA applies clear criteria for categorising, intervening and supporting schools. Using well planned exit strategies, it has been successful in removing schools from special measures and serious weaknesses within the required timescale. Nevertheless, the number of schools that are judged to have serious weaknesses or requiring special measures, gives cause for some concern about the effectiveness and precision of the LEA's early warning systems. In one case, the LEA failed to take early and decisive action to prevent a school from being returned to the special measures designation following its second inspection.

Recommendation

- Act upon the information from early warning systems more robustly and decisively to prevent schools falling into serious weaknesses or special measures designations.

Supply and quality of teachers

38. The LEA has made good progress in assuring the supply and quality of teachers and its performance in this aspect is good. Teacher vacancy levels are lower than the national and similar LEA averages and fell from a high of 31 vacancies (0.8%) in January 2002 to 14 (0.3%) in January 2003. The returns to date from schools for 2004 also indicate a low vacancy rate. A valuable partnership between the directorate's school improvement and achievement division and the human resources section and the development of an extensive database have ensured good knowledge of emerging patterns of recruitment and retention. Inspectors' secure knowledge of schools and the collection and analysis of a comprehensive range of data have been used effectively to anticipate needs in different areas of the county, in particular phases and in individual schools. For example, in a recent area reorganisation, age profiles were analysed comprehensively to predict staffing needs and potential for redeployment.

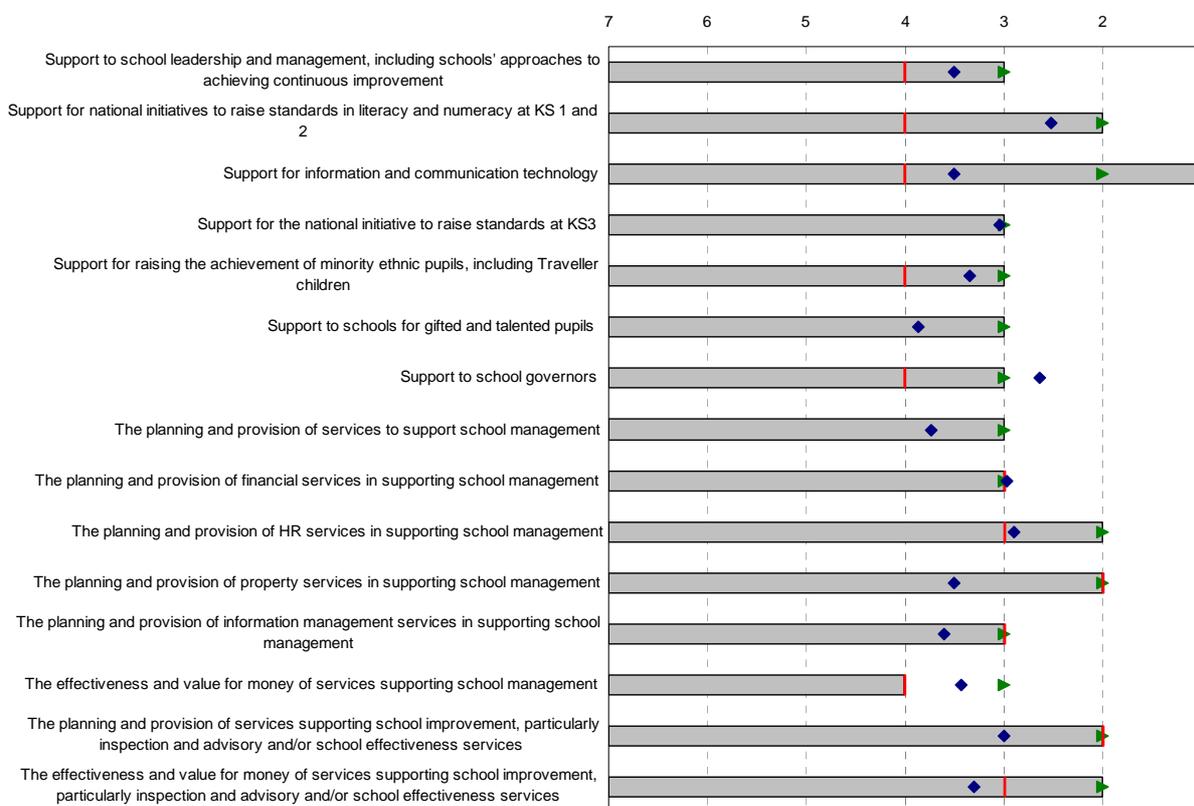
39. The LEA's strategy for supporting schools is effective. The development of electronic application forms has increased the interest in teaching vacancies. As a result of an external survey commissioned by the LEA, schools now have high quality promotional materials to attract potential teachers to Worcestershire. A particular strength in this area is the importance that the LEA attaches to a good work-life balance as part of career development. This, linked to a comprehensive continuing professional development programme, anticipates the workforce reforms well. The LEA places increasing emphasis on bespoke training to meet the identified needs of schools. The programme for the development of newly-qualified teachers, leaders and managers, and the increased access to training for potential supply teachers and those returning to the profession, contribute to the overall positive picture of teacher quality and supply in the county.

Providing school places

40. The LEA's performance in this area is highly satisfactory. Forecasting of pupil numbers is highly accurate and there is an effective school organisation committee that is well supported by stakeholders. Although the number of surplus places in secondary schools fell to 6.1% in 2002/03, there was still an above average percentage (11.1%) in the primary sector. To address this, the LEA has developed a well-planned, targeted programme of area reviews for those parts of the county where there are a higher number of surplus places. This plan is already having an effect. Since the last inspection over 2,000 places have been removed in Redditch, four other area reviews have been undertaken and work on the Wyre Forest area is currently under way.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



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Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

41. The LEA's support for leadership and management has improved since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory. Support is well integrated into planning and is reflected across all priorities in EDP2. The number of schools requiring specific intervention has reduced and the LEA's work has rightly focused on improving the overall quality of leadership and management which is not yet as strong as in similar authorities and nationally.

42. The LEA has made significant progress in providing schools with useful comparative performance and financial data. This has been supported with training for headteachers and governors. Where the LEA has used the data to inform its priorities and actions, for example in ICT and school self-evaluation, it has done so intelligently and this has sharpened the focus of its work. However, this is not yet fully embedded in all functions.

43. The LEA provides a clear focus and direction in supporting school self-evaluation and secures strong partnerships with schools. During the last cycle of evaluation, a priority was to identify schools' systems for evaluating teaching and learning. This is consistent with the prominence given to improving the quality of teaching and learning in the authority's support for national primary strategies, Key Stage 3 and ICT.

44. Comprehensive systems have been developed to assess the rigour of schools' own self-evaluation processes. Results from the first cycle, in summer 2003, have provided reliable data to help target support and intervention more precisely to the 10% of schools where self-evaluation is less secure. This is a positive development but generally, support for school self-evaluation, while thorough, has proceeded too slowly since the last inspection.

45. The LEA has provided a strong lead in identifying and promoting high quality training and high aspirations for continuous improvement. Effective partnerships have been built with external agencies, such as the National College of School Leadership, to extend and refresh the professional expertise of headteachers and middle managers. The take-up of these opportunities has been high and all the components for career progression are in place. However, this is not yet fully co-ordinated into a systematic programme.

46. As a direct result of the LEA fulfilling its responsibilities to devolve more services, headteachers and governors now have many more opportunities to exercise choice in procuring services and in making Best Value judgements than they did at the time of the previous inspection. Progress in supporting schools in using these opportunities actively, and in developing skills in procurement and Best Value beyond a basic level, has been too slow. The take-up of training opportunities has been low and evidence from schools reveals a general reluctance to change current arrangements significantly. The LEA has not been active enough in challenging this view in order to fulfil its responsibility to support schools' autonomy and to develop their role as discerning customers of services.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

47. Support for ICT is very good and there has been significant improvement since the previous inspection. Support is now securely focussed on improving the quality of teachers' and pupils' use of ICT to raise standards. This is reflected in the LEA's strategic planning and in schools' own development plans. Strong and effective support is provided to schools for the leadership and management of ICT.

48. The depth and range of information held by the LEA are outstanding and used effectively to provide an accurate assessment of each school's current performance and progress towards agreed targets. Data systems are analysed extensively to identify and evaluate trends, providing early warning of emerging school needs and the timely development of high quality and innovative resources.

49. The LEA has built strong partnerships with schools. Regular communication with all stakeholders is supported through an extensive range of conferences, strategic groups and web-based forums. The clarity of communication and the transparency regarding funding are welcomed and understood by schools. These are key factors in securing trust in the judgement and expertise of officers.

50. The LEA has not met its own 2003 Key Stage 3 target for ICT attainment at Level 5. Robust steps have been taken to accelerate progress and challenging targets for 2004 are likely to be met. This projection is based upon the provision of intensive support to enable teachers to make secure assessments at the end of each key stage. The LEA's self-evaluation demonstrates increasing consistency in teachers' judgements. It has established protocols to improve the support for continuity in learning and has developed new, original electronic systems to ensure effective transfer of data and pupils' work.

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

51. Support for Key Stage 3 is highly satisfactory. The LEA concentrates its support on improving the quality of teaching and continuity of learning in Key Stages 2 and 3, where data indicate that this is a weakness. Worcestershire's strategic approach takes full account of the complexity in planning, transferring information and in maintaining progress at multiple points of transfer during Key Stage 3.

52. The expertise of Key Stage 3 consultants is good and schools value the support they receive. Their work, in all strands of the strategy, is beginning to have an effect in all schools, increasing teachers' confidence and pupils' motivation. Extensive work with teachers, focusing on planning and assessment, is providing greater support and continuity of learning for pupils moving between middle schools and high schools.

53. Data are used well to identify strengths and weaknesses at Key Stage 3. Systems are in place to record the effect of consultants' work. However, the LEA's evaluation of intervention work does not focus sufficiently on the progress and attainment of pupils. This is leading to insufficient clarity in identifying what more needs to be done to improve standards further.

54. The LEA recognises a need to identify strategies to tackle the emerging issues around behaviour and the high rate of fixed-term exclusions at Key Stage 3. Behaviour consultants have been appointed and training and support to schools are at an early stage of development.

Recommendation

- Ensure that systems for regular evaluation and reporting by consultants and the strategy manager identify the effect on pupils' attainment and progress in Key Stage 3.

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

55. The LEA has made sound progress in this aspect of its work and the provision is now highly satisfactory. Provision for Traveller children is planned well and carefully monitored. Attendance rates have improved steadily since the last inspection. There are few, statistically significant, minority ethnic groups in Worcestershire. Accordingly, targets are set only for those pupils from Pakistani heritage. For this group, all but one of the attainment targets have been exceeded although these were set at a modest level. Officers report that they were based on data available at the time. There are several, well-focused school-based

projects to support mainly Asian pupils. Monitoring and evaluation take place on a project-by-project basis and indicate positive outcomes. There are too few refugee children in the county to justify specialist provision, but their needs are met through the application of the isolated learners strategy.

Support for school governors

56. Sound progress has been made in this function and provision is now highly satisfactory. This inspection focused in particular on the LEA's training programme, the use of data, recruitment initiatives, and support for governors in schools causing concern. The service has many strengths, including: an exceptionally low vacancy rate, half the national average; a clear focus on schools causing concern, where vacancies are filled very promptly; a wide range of costed courses and services on offer; and useful, comprehensive data. However, attendance has been variable on some courses and evaluation sometimes focuses too much on matters such as suitability of venues rather than on learning outcomes.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

57. This function is highly satisfactory overall. The information provided to schools about services is clear and comprehensive. It is displayed in a single booklet and includes details of costs, levels of service offered, and contact details. Schools are generally satisfied with the services offered and are consulted regularly about the extent and specification of services. Adjustments are made each year to meet changing needs. However, there are some weaknesses. Schools are generally not well placed to become discerning customers of services and many schools, especially primary, are reluctant to consider alternative providers to the LEA. They report that the LEA gives them the best value for money, even though they have not always tested the market. Consequently, the LEA has not been highly active in encouraging schools to assess its services against those of external providers. For example, it has not published lists of alternative providers for all services, although this information is generally available on request. In contrast, a small number of other schools, mainly secondary, feel that the LEA has been too slow to offer the support and guidance they need to become discerning purchasers.

Recommendations

- Provide published lists of alternative providers for all services.
- Reflect clearly in guidance materials and training how Best Value principles and practice apply in the context of schools.

58. **Finance.** This service remains highly satisfactory. The inspection focused on the support for individual schools, transfer of financial information and error reconciliation. There are a number of strengths and schools are highly satisfied with the service they receive as reflected in the vast majority of schools that buy back the service. Finance staff are readily accessible to all schools but give particular attention to schools causing concern or those with deficit budgets. The introduction of electronic transfer is now well under way, although it is not yet complete. Work is in progress to address error reconciliation problems and the LEA expects to have new protocols in place by April 2004.

59. **Information management.** This inspection confirms the LEA's self-evaluation that this function is highly satisfactory. The strengths of this function include a co-ordinated strategy for applying information technology to administrative and curriculum functions, explicit service standards for users, and an effective complaints procedure. The Worcestershire Grid for Learning is comprehensive and used frequently by schools. Nevertheless, some schools, especially special schools, are dissatisfied with the technical support they receive and the effectiveness of electronic communication. Schools have developed their own email systems independently and the LEA is now working to make these compatible and minimise the level of failed communications.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

60. The effectiveness of services to support school improvement is good. The findings of this inspection confirm the LEA's self-evaluation and acknowledge the significant progress that has been made since the last inspection. More services have been delegated, including the learning and behaviour support service. Evidence from schools confirms that there is a clear understanding of those services to which they are entitled as a result of their categorisation for support and those for which they must pay.

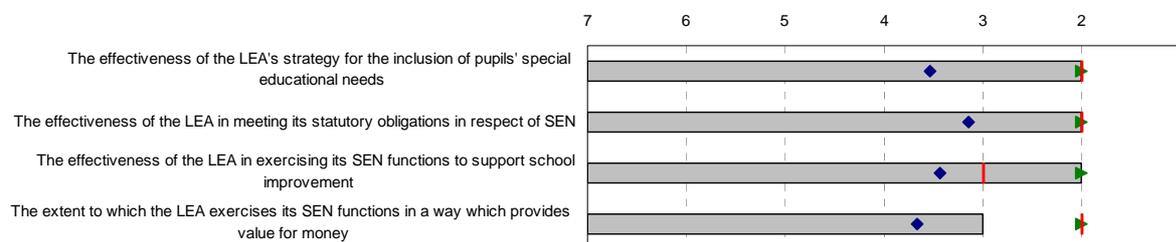
61. Consultation with service users is good. The director of educational services has been active in establishing a directors' group with headteachers to provide an additional level of scrutiny and an overview of all aspects of service provision. Regular and informal feedback is given to improve services at all levels. Headteachers are mostly positive about the timeliness and usefulness of formal systems of annual reporting. This inspection confirms that the school improvement and achievement division have an accurate understanding of their strengths and areas for development through effective self-evaluation processes.

62. The planning and provision of services are good. Since the last inspection the capacity of the school improvement and achievement division has increased and issues of excessive workload have been comprehensively addressed. This service has many strengths that include: the expertise and deployment of staff; their induction and systems for continuing professional development; and the implementation of performance management systems. The LEA has also started to build further capacity through numerous partnership arrangements, including those in the private sector. Service planning is clear and coherent at all levels, and is linked consistently to priorities identified in EDP2. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are in place. The regularity with which progress towards outcomes is identified and evaluated, however, is more variable across services.

63. The value for money of services to support school improvement is good. Costs of services to support school improvement have risen, but are comparable with those of similar authorities. The LEA provides services that are competitive in their costs when compared with other sources and has been successful in brokering provision from the private sector and from other LEAs.

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

64. The LEA's strategy for SEN remains good. It is appropriately integrated with the social inclusion strategy, is linked to corporate objectives and complies fully with statutory requirements. Since the previous inspection, senior staff have worked together closely to strengthen working partnerships between services for SEN and school improvement services. Similarly, partnerships between the LEA, social services and health services have improved and are secure. All partners have a shared understanding of, and commitment to, the national and local agenda for inclusion.

65. The LEA's strategy is coherent and consistent with key education plans. The focus of current work is to narrow the gap between the attainment of the lowest-attaining 20% of pupils in the county and their peers. Data collected for this purpose demonstrate that progress is being made. The use of data to inform provision for specific groups is at an early stage although there has been progress already in some areas, for example in developing provision for pupils with autism.

66. The authority is currently re-examining its provision with a view to including more children with SEN in mainstream schools. Initial changes have been meticulously planned and carried out. For example, when preparing to close a special school and move the pupils to mainstream and special school settings, the LEA carried out detailed consultation and an extensive functional assessment of each pupil's needs. The pace of change towards increased inclusion is accelerating.

67. Consultation on the development of the strategy has been comprehensive, resulting in secure commitment from stakeholders. There are strong formal links at strategic and middle management levels and voluntary organisations are closely involved as members of the inclusion steering group. This group has acted as a catalyst to developments, leading discussion and securing agreement on key principles.

68. The LEA allocates budgets in an open and transparent way, although it does not seek directly information on how resources are used. For pupils with statements, the LEA monitors annual reviews to see that the allocated resources are available for these pupils but there is inconsistency in the analysis of trends to inform planning for groups of pupils with specific types of needs. Funding streams are co-ordinated across agencies and this particularly benefits children with complex and continuing needs, who are well supported through the pooling of resources.

69. Senior officers and members have a close interest in, and are well informed of, the progress being made towards inclusive practice. Members have visited local special schools, in order to understand better the implications of decision-making about increased inclusion.

70. The disability action plan is good and clearly sets out measures being taken to improve access to schools for pupils with a wide variety of physical needs.

Statutory obligations

71. The LEA has made good progress in meeting its statutory obligations and its overall performance in this area is good. It has kept pace with the new legislative requirements and the revised Code of Practice for SEN is fully implemented. Special educational needs procedures take all reasonable steps to comply with statutory obligations. Agreed criteria for statutory assessment are transparent, fully disseminated and widely understood. The education services directorate and external agencies work well together and have a shared understanding of each others' responsibilities. This partnership is well promoted by the strong commitment of officers involved and underpinned by the health authority's specialist children's services manager, who co-ordinates work with all three National Health Service (NHS) trusts in the region. The percentage of statutory assessments completed within time limits has improved significantly and is in line with national averages. However, further work is required to reduce the numbers that are late because of delayed advice from other agencies.

72. Information and guidance to parents are good. The quality of support by parent partnership services is highly regarded and parents have ready access to independent support. A high proportion of requests for statutory assessment are agreed after initially being declined, indicating that the LEA reconsiders decisions in the light of further information. However, these cases are not analysed to determine why this information is not available earlier.

73. Pre-school children with SEN are well supported. An early years team assists settings to support these children. Funding and procedures have been streamlined to support their entry into mainstream school without the requirement of a statement of special educational needs.

74. The LEA is efficient at making and maintaining statements. The recommendation from the previous inspection has been addressed and the quality of statement writing has been improved and is now consistently good. There is a very tight system for monitoring annual reviews of statements and priority is given to reviews when children move between each phase of schooling. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) report that this

regular monitoring of annual reviews has led to improved practice and more tailored provision.

Recommendation

- With health and social services, secure agreed protocols and monitoring systems to increase the proportion of statements of SEN completed within expected timescales.

SEN functions to support school improvement

75. Significant progress has been made in this area and provision is now good. The links between SENCOs and school link inspectors have strengthened and there is greater consistency in the LEA's approach to improving the skills and raising the confidence of school staff in meeting the special needs of pupils.

76. Links between SEN support staff and inspectors are also good. Special educational needs provision is reviewed at regular meetings and priority is given to schools in difficulties. Link inspectors use agreed frameworks for reviewing and evaluating the SEN performance in all schools. There are specific performance reviews for special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs).

77. The LEA provides additional training courses for teachers and teaching assistants. These contribute significantly to their understanding and confidence in meeting the needs of individual pupils, their understanding of the SEN strategy and their role within the process. The annual review and associated procedures have been tightened since the last inspection to ensure that targets in pupils' individual educational plans are consistently focused upon their specified needs.

78. Monitoring of support services reveals a high degree of user satisfaction, but current measures do not fully evaluate their effect on pupils' achievement. The LEA has recognised this gap and is investigating additional outcome measures.

Value for money

79. Value for money is currently highly satisfactory although the effect of the LEA's spending on the progress of individual pupils with SEN but without statements is not directly monitored. Worcestershire is prudent in its SEN spending, responds to priorities and delivers services of good quality, despite relatively low spending compared with other LEAs. Budgets for SEN are regularly monitored and rarely overspent. The LEA ensures that elected members receive regular budget reports and specific exceptions are reported to the cabinet. The majority of funding for SEN, including that for behaviour support, has now been delegated to schools, with a major increase in 2002-03. The LEA recognises that spending on special schools is high, but pupil numbers in this sector are declining and a comprehensive review of this is in progress.

80. Criteria for identifying pupils with SEN were devised in consultation with key stakeholders and are both clear and consistent with the revised Code of Practice for SEN. There are also clear criteria for allocating funding for pupils with statements of SEN in a way that accurately reflects individual levels of need. The LEA regularly monitors schools' use of

these resources to ensure that they are targeted on those pupils for whom they are intended. However, it does not have robust processes to evaluate the resulting progress of individual pupils who do not have a statement of SEN. Within the context of its sound systems for monitoring spending, the LEA has the capacity to make further progress, particularly in relation to the monitoring of individual outcomes.

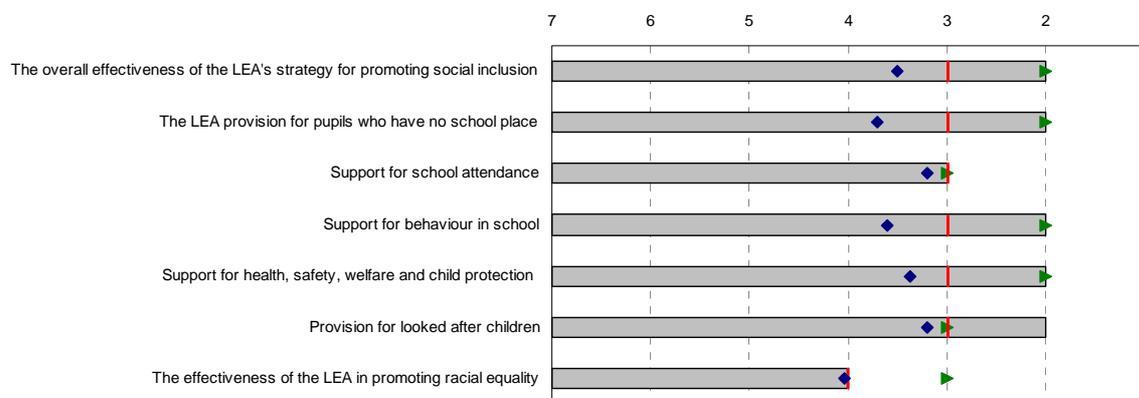
81. The strategy to improve access for disabled pupils is coherent and closely aligned to financial planning. The LEA has carried out a full audit of access to buildings and has prioritised work on a geographical basis in order to ensure that at least one school in each locality offers full access to the curriculum for disabled pupils.

Recommendation

- Implement an auditing and monitoring programme for all schools to ensure better value for money for SEN.

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 LEA's strategy for social inclusion

82. There has been significant improvement in the LEA's approach to social inclusion since the previous inspection, when this function was judged highly satisfactory. It is now good, with many strengths and few weaknesses. The LEA takes reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and many key indicators are improving as a result of effective work by officers at all levels. There are fewer permanent exclusions of pupils, although the overall level remains high in comparison to averages in similar LEAs and nationally. There is more accreditation of achievement for children without a school place and the attainments of looked after children are higher. Significant rises in fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools and weak attainment of children in some minority ethnic groups are acknowledged by the LEA as areas for attention. Schools now value more highly and uniformly the support they receive from the LEA across the range of social inclusion functions.

83. There is cohesion between national initiatives and strategic planning at corporate and directorate levels. In particular, the LEA's strategic plan for inclusion for 2003 to 2006 is comprehensive and understood and accepted by schools, who feel they have been appropriately involved in its development. As the council shapes services, young people and their parents or carers are increasingly consulted and are given opportunities to feed back on service delivery. Corporate priorities for social inclusion are well understood by senior officers, but less so by schools.

84. The LEA clearly links achievement and inclusion. It has carried out a local audit of need in relation to those at risk of social exclusion and has made a good start on developing an identification, referral and tracking system. The LEA is able to identify and acknowledge weaknesses through robust analysis of performance data and other management information. This range of information has allowed the LEA to work successfully with partners, both in

statutory agencies and more widely. It has, thereby, increasingly integrated services for those with additional needs in a variety of areas, such as SEN, disability, behaviour, ethnicity, health, welfare and family circumstances. The LEA targets resources to priorities and has attracted funding from outside the council. In some areas, however, a firmer line with schools is required to ensure compliance with council policies in relation to the need to undertake training and complete returns on the monitoring of racist incidents.

85. The quality and leadership of staff at all levels of the education service are good. They have been central to encouraging and promoting a range of integrated initiatives to complement the social inclusion agenda. Effectiveness is proven, for example in narrowing the gap between the achievements of different groups of young people and improving the participation of children at risk. Together with key partners, the LEA has the capacity to respond effectively to national expectations in order to secure further improvement for those at risk of educational and social exclusion.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

86. The LEA's provision for pupils educated other than at school has improved and is now good. There is a more appropriate range of provision and a greater understanding among schools of the need to work with the LEA. The LEA collects good data on permanently excluded pupils. It knows where all permanently excluded pupils are placed and provides 25 hours of tuition per week within 15 days of exclusion. Procedures reflect a strong ethos of returning pupils to school, applied at least until the beginning of Year 10. At this point there is a wide range of innovative, effective and flexible alternative provision that offers varying routes to accreditation of achievement. Unvalidated evidence shows a very large rise in the number of pupils achieving at least one GCSE pass at grade A* to G or equivalent. Attendance rates in PRUs have remained static and action is being taken to make provision more attractive.

87. Schools endorse the LEA's management of the procedures for the readmission of excluded pupils. Schools work better with each other and with the LEA to enable more pupils who have been permanently excluded to attend another school. Reintegration officers were introduced in 2001 to work with families to overcome barriers to such placements and also to support reintegration from PRUs through careful assessments and support. Appropriate data are held on children educated at home through parental choice, and officers regularly monitor their welfare and education. Pupils who are taken off the roll of one school are carefully tracked and the LEA takes reasonable steps to ensure that all children are now provided with suitable education.

88. Total funding across the related areas of PRUs, education otherwise than at school and behaviour support is broadly in line with similar authorities. The LEA has recently begun to plan to reduce the high costs of PRUs at Key Stages 2 and 3, in order to enhance provision for behaviour support and in-school units. However, overall, Worcestershire is increasingly fulfilling its commitment to raise achievement and is well placed to make further improvements.

Support for behaviour

89. The LEA's support to schools and pupils in improving behaviour is closely aligned to its educational and social inclusion strategies, has shown significant progress and is now good. Officers analyse the effect of support for schools and pupils, monitor data on pupils' attainments and attendance and identify actions to be taken. Arrangements for appeals by parents against exclusions are well established. The number of permanent exclusions has fallen significantly from a peak in 2000/01, but figures remain high compared with averages in similar authorities and nationally. Intervention led by the LEA ensures that no pupils are excluded from special schools. There has been a rise in numbers of fixed-term exclusions at secondary level, although the rate of increase has now declined, partly as a result of managed transfers where pupils are identified as being at risk of exclusion.

90. The full range of behavioural difficulties is addressed by services and activities that emphasise the retention of pupils in schools. High schools with learning support units have continued to maintain these when external funding for their establishment ceased. To avoid gaps or duplication, the LEA restructured all support services into two teams serving primary schools and secondary schools respectively, with costs that are now broadly comparable with other counties. Regular multi-professional meetings take place in schools, both to discuss ways in which support can be made more effective to the school as a whole and to plan for individual pupils. Multi-agency support is offered where pupils have personal, emotional or mental health difficulties.

91. Ofsted data confirm that the LEA makes good provision for behaviour and that the amount of oppressive behaviour and bullying in Worcestershire's schools is lower than that found in similar authorities or nationally. The LEA challenges individual schools with high exclusion rates or where admissions are resisted and, at the same time, it has acted to reduce the pressure on schools by developing a range of options to resolve behaviour issues. For example, it offers wide-ranging alternative provision at Key Stage 4, as well as targeted support from the behaviour support teams and time-limited off-site courses through the PRUs for younger pupils, especially at Key Stage 3. The LEA monitors the costs of provision, some of which have been met from external sources. It makes clear to schools that targeted funding will be withdrawn if this does not lead to reduced levels of exclusion. The effectiveness of its actions and careful use of resources indicate that the LEA has good capacity for further improvement.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

92. At the previous inspection, support for health and safety, welfare, and child protection were highly satisfactory. Good progress has been made since that time and these functions are now good. The LEA is taking all reasonable steps to fulfil its statutory responsibilities in this area. The LEA has successfully integrated child protection activity within the promoting inclusion priority of EDP2 as part of a wider approach to safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of children and young people. The capacity for further improvement is good.

93. A number of key factors contribute to the LEA's overall effectiveness. At a strategic level, there is good partnership work within the council by senior officers and the

LEA maintains appropriate representation on the Area Child Protection Committee. The LEA also contributes actively to the West Midlands regional child protection network. At an operational level, the child protection procedures and guidelines are comprehensive and clear. Schools are complimentary about the support they receive from the LEA's officers and advisers, which results in high levels of confidence in applying the criteria when making referrals. In addition, rapid response and helpline facilities are highly regarded by those teachers and managers with designated responsibility. A comprehensive, multi-agency and differentiated training programme complements the support available to schools and other educational settings. The LEA has recently developed a suitably detailed database to ensure that there are designated responsible staff for child protection whose training profile and record is up to date. Further, monitoring of schools' policies and procedures for child protection are robust and contribute to the clear understanding of respective responsibilities and accountabilities.

Provision for looked after children

94. The LEA's contribution to the care, welfare and attainment of children looked after by the local authority has improved significantly and is now good. The council has clear, effective protocols for inter-agency work across education, social and health services and records are updated monthly. Targeted support for looked after children, both for those within Worcestershire and those placed elsewhere, is provided by a jointly-funded service that places a high priority on raising attainment. An important feature is that referrals are taken not just for those already in the looked after system but also those on the periphery. The council emphasises the appropriate involvement of looked after children and young people and their parents or carers in processes, arrangements and evaluations.

95. Joint guidance on work with looked after children was published in 2001. A training programme for designated teachers and social workers should involve all schools by 2005. Where schools with a looked after pupil have not yet been directly trained, visiting staff provide advice and support. All schools have a designated teacher and good progress is being made towards the provision of personal education plans for all looked after children. These plans are available electronically to social workers. Pupils' targets are monitored and underperformance is identified by the designated teacher and the LEA support team, and then addressed by the class or subject teacher. There is effective monitoring of school attendance, which is targeted within the personal education plan. The effectiveness of interventions is evident in improving trends, such as a further reduction in the small number of permanently excluded pupils and in the rising levels of attainment, which are now in line with similar authorities and national averages. The careful maintenance of appropriate data has allowed challenging, but realistic, targets to be set for the performance of the service and the achievements of looked after children. As a result of the explicit link between social and educational inclusion, the leadership of officers and effective multi-agency work, the performance of this function is increasingly highly regarded by schools and the LEA has considerable potential for further progress.

Promoting racial equality

96. The LEA's work to combat racism and promote racial equality continues to be satisfactory, as it was when last inspected. There are strengths in the corporate and

educational priorities to develop pupils and staff from a minority ethnic background and to promote equality. Since the last inspection, the LEA has targeted activity more widely. Schools are more aware of mechanisms to support the achievement of minority ethnic group children and find the LEA's support for combating racism more effective. The proportion of teachers and support staff from minority ethnic groups has increased in schools, although they are under-represented at senior levels. The LEA has established appropriate opportunities for professional development including encouragement to undertake initial teacher training.

97. The overall proportion of children from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly in line with averages for similar LEAs. However, some towns have relatively high minority ethnic populations alongside areas with few or no children from such groups, making it harder to analyse overall trends in outcomes. The LEA has recognised the need to support isolated learners, through the appointment of staff to support schools and their pupils; there is particularly well-regarded work, through regional consortium arrangements, to promote the attendance and learning of pupils from traveller families. However, the proportion of permanent exclusions from minority ethnic groups has recently risen and there is evidence that the LEA and its schools have not set sufficiently challenging targets for pupils from some minority ethnic groups.

98. The council is taking reasonable steps to meet statutory requirements, including the development of a race equality scheme and its response to the requirements following the McPherson inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. The LEA has provided guidance and training on preparing and implementing policies for race equality in schools and appointed an associate headteacher to develop practice in schools. Although a comprehensive log of the take-up of relevant training is maintained, schools are not required to attend. Headteachers are required to respond to reports of alleged racial harassment and to report these to the LEA, but they are not required to submit nil returns. As a result, the LEA cannot be confident of the commitment of all schools to promoting racial equality and combating racism.

Recommendations

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that representatives from all schools attend appropriate training on a regular basis to improve work in promoting racial equality and in combating racism.• Ensure that at all schools submit regular returns showing whether or not any racist incidents or alleged incidents have occurred. |
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Appendix A: Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Worcestershire Local Education Authority
LEA number:	885
Reporting Inspector:	Kevin Jane HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2004

No	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Fieldwork*
	Context of the LEA		
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	3	
	Overall judgements		
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	2	
0.2	Overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
	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	2	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	2	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	3	
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 quality of advice)	2	NF
1.7	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	2	NF
1.8	The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities	1	

1.9	Support for Early Years' education	2	
1.10	Support for 14 – 19 education	4	
1.11	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	1	
Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation			
2.1	The LEA's strategy for school improvement	2	
2.2	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement	2	
2.3	The performance of schools	3	
2.4	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention	2	NF
2.5	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
2.6	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	2	
2.7	The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	3	
2.8	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	
2.9	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	3	
2.10	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	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	2	NF
3.3	Support for information and communication technology	1	

3.4	Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3	3	
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	3	NF
3.7	Support for school governors	3	
3.8	The planning and provision of services to support school management, particularly:	3	
3.8a	The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management	3	
3.8b	The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management	2	NF
3.8c	The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management	2	NF
3.8d	The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management	3	
3.9	The effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management	4	
3.10	The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	2	
3.11	The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services	2	
Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)			
4.1	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN)	2	
4.2	The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	
4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	2	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	3	

Section 5: Support for social inclusion			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	2	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	2	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	NF
5.4	Support for behaviour in school	2	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	2	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	2	
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

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

This inspection of Worcestershire 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 2000;
- 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, Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (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:

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice);• the quality of leadership provided by senior officers;• the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention;• the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools;• support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2;• support to schools for gifted and talented children;• human resources; |
|---|

- property services;
- 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

Worcestershire is a mainly rural county situated in the West Midlands. The major centres of population are the city of Worcester and the towns of Bromsgrove, Redditch, Evesham, Droitwich, Kidderminster and Malvern. These centres mostly correspond with the county's six district councils. Although 7% of the wards fall in the lower quartile of wards nationally, based on the index of multiple deprivation, most areas of Worcestershire have above average rankings. Unemployment at 4.4% is lower than the national average of 6.3%.

The school age population is 79,726 and has remained stable over the last four years but slightly lower than the position at the last inspection. Minority ethnic groups make up 3.2% of the school age population, lower than nationally, but broadly in line with statistical neighbours' averages. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in both primary and secondary schools (9.5%) is in line with the average for similar LEAs and in line with secondary schools against national averages, but below for primary schools. The percentage of pupils in primary schools (2.7%) and secondary schools (3.7%) with a statement of SEN is in line with national and similar LEAs' averages. The percentage of pupils below statutory school age who are on the roll of a primary school is 87%, a significant improvement on the position at the last inspection.

The LEA provides education in 264 schools and 9 PRUs. The overall number of schools is lower than at the time of the last inspection owing to amalgamations and school closures. School organisation remains complex due to a mixture in different parts of the county of two- and three-tier systems and multiple ages of transfer. Currently, there is one nursery school, 187 first and primary schools of which four are infant and four are junior. There are five middle-deemed primary and 29 middle-deemed secondary schools. There are 29 high schools of which 22 provide post-16 education and 15 schools have specialist status. The LEA maintains 13 special schools. As at the last inspection, there is a significant proportion of small primary phase schools.

The performance of schools

Pupils make a good start in Worcestershire and baseline assessment shows that they attain higher than national averages on entry to school.

In Key Stages 1 to 3 pupils' attainment is broadly in line with statistical neighbours and national averages. Over the last four years and including unvalidated data for the 2002/03 academic year, progress has been made overall in all core subjects in these key stages, but this progress has been uneven and attainment has fallen short of targets set in EDP2. Nevertheless, attainment overall in Worcestershire matches the national trend.

At GCSE level, for those pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades (or equivalent) attainment is broadly in line with statistical neighbours and national averages for boys and girls and the gap in their respective attainment is narrowing. For lower-attaining pupils, attainment is in line with national averages but below that of statistical neighbours. Targets for 2002 in EDP2 for this age group were exceeded for higher and lower attainers. At Advanced level, pupils attain in line with national and statistical neighbours averages.

Funding data for the LEA

Schools budget	Worcestershire	Statistical neighbours average	County Average	ENGLAND AVERAGE
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2,461	2,509	2,540	2,708
Standards fund delegated	48	55	56	61
Education for under fives	73	98	91	96
Strategic management	24	26	22	29
Special educational needs	50	97	110	120
Grants	6	14	14	53
Access	46	42	43	55
Capital expenditure from revenue	56	24	28	24
TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET	2,763	2,866	2,905	3,145
Schools formula spending share	2,539	2,602	2,654	2,904

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

LEA budget	Worcestershire	Statistical neighbours average	County Average	ENGLAND AVERAGE
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	56	82	82	95
Specific Grants	13	10	12	16
Special educational needs	26	24	27	32
School improvement	44	32	34	36
Access	163	163	173	133
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	2	2	2
Youth and Community	35	51	50	74
TOTAL LEA BUDGET	336	364	379	388

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04

Note: All figures are net

Notes