audit
commission

INSPECTION OF

WILTSHIRE

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

January 2002

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INTRODUCTION

1.   This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities,* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2.   The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with LEA Members, staff in the Department of Education and Libraries and in other council departments, representatives of the LEA's partners, and representative groups of headteachers and governors. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 78 per cent.

3.   The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to ten primary schools, one special school, one middle (deemed secondary) school and six secondary schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits and discussions considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

4.   Evidence was also drawn from recent visits to Wiltshire schools and analysis of LEA documentation by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI), undertaking national monitoring work.

COMMENTARY

5.   Wiltshire is a largely rural county, half the population of which lives in small settlements. There is a relatively high rate of mobility in many schools, mainly as the result of a significant presence in the county of the armed services. Unemployment is low. There is a wide range of school provision that includes primary schools, infant and junior schools, first, middle and upper schools, comprehensive, secondary modern and grammar schools. There are many small primary schools; one third have fewer than 100 pupils on roll.

6.   The council has funded education at, or slightly above, the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) in recent years and has passed increases in the SSA into the education budget.   The SSA per pupil for Wiltshire is in the lowest quarter of all councils nationally, but its level of delegation is average. The average funding per pupil provided to schools is the second lowest in England. Significant contributory factors to this low level of funding are the high costs of transport and the high and rising costs of out-of-county placements for special educational needs.

7.   Standards of attainment are variable. Whilst at Key Stages 1 and 2, attainment is broadly in line with national averages, it is below that found in similar LEAs. Progress in all core subjects in both these key stages is below average. However, at Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment is above the national average and at least equivalent to that found in similar LEAs. The LEA's performance data are not yet sufficiently detailed for it to be able to challenge all its schools consistently, particularly as a result of the transient nature of some of its school population.

8.   The council is emerging from a period when relationships with its schools were at a very low ebb.   Following recent improvements, the LEA now performs adequately overall, but there is more to do before the support it provides can become consistently effective.   Many schools had, and some still retain, an unrealistic expectation of the role of a modern LEA and do not appreciate fully its need to target support where it is most needed.   The chief education officer, appointed in January 2000, has made considerable progress in rebuilding these relationships and gives clear educational direction.   There is now an increasing feeling of trust and confidence in many schools. Consultation is good and there is a shared understanding of the need to raise standards, particularly in the primary phase.

9.   Support for school improvement has many sound and improving features, but there are weaknesses presently in the support for literacy and information and communications technology. Much sharper strategies for monitoring and intervening in schools have addressed previous weaknesses in the identification of schools causing concern. The small team of link advisers gives good support to schools in all phases. The new local education teams, intended to integrate support for inclusion and special educational needs, have considerable potential, and schools welcome the principle behind their formation. The LEA has encouraged and supported the autonomy of its schools.

10. However, the development of long-term strategies for inclusion, special educational needs and information and communication technology has been slow.

Whilst there are many pockets of good practice in the LEA, these often occur without a clear strategic overview within which to operate; for example, some very good practice in the support for pupils from Traveller families in the county is not reflected in any strategy to address wider issues of diversity. Progress sometimes is not maintained when key individuals move between posts or are absent from work for a sustained period.

11. The progress made since January 2000 has brought Wiltshire LEA to the point where many of its functions are performed satisfactorily but, as yet, few are performed particularly well. The following functions are included in this latter category:

- support to governors;
- partnership with external agencies;
- arrangements for admissions; and
- support for school attendance.

12. There are, however, several functions that are not being carried out satisfactorily:

- collection and analysis of data;
- support to raise standards of literacy;
- support for curriculum and administrative applications of information and communication technology (ICT);
- strategy and support for school improvement in special educational provision;
- provision for pupils who have no school place;
- support for behaviour at school; and
- measures taken to combat racism.

13. The LEA is aware of these weaknesses and work is already in progress to address many of them. The council has approved the integration of the county's children and family services with the education and libraries department in 2003. This development presents an ideal opportunity and a precise timescale for the LEA to define clearly its strategies for inclusion and special educational needs in consultation with its partners.

14. Whilst the agenda set by this inspection is considerable, there is evidence of much recent improvement and the strengths now outweigh the weaknesses. With strong support from elected members and schools and the clearer educational direction and leadership now given, we believe that the LEA has the capacity to make continued progress to address the issues raised in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15.   Wiltshire is predominately rural, particularly so since Swindon separated from the county in 1997 to become a unitary authority. It is nevertheless a diverse county with small pockets of deprivation. Half of its population of 431,000 lives in settlements of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants and one third lives in smaller, rural settlements of fewer than 1,000. Four small towns contain a majority of inhabitants who are members of the armed forces and their dependants. These families provide 10.6 per cent of the pupil population and this leads to high rates of mobility in the schools that serve these communities. One third of primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils on roll.

16.   Unemployment is low at 1.2 per cent. Half the workforce is employed in the service sector. Major occupations include the public services, manufacturing, technology, distribution and financial services.

17.   Twelve per cent of three-year-olds and 95 per cent of four-year-olds have access to early years education. The county has funding to provide three terms of education for a third of three-year-olds during the current academic year. The LEA maintains 260 schools of which 219 are primary (including infant, first, junior and junior/infant), five are middle schools, 29 are secondary schools (including comprehensive, grammar and secondary modern), six are special schools and there is one pupil referral unit. Eighty-two of the schools have community status, 91 are controlled, 63 are aided and 24 have foundation status. In addition, 26 independent schools are located in the county.   There are four primary and three secondary schools with beacon status. Nine schools have specialist status (four for technology, one for modern languages, two for sport and two for arts).

18.   The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals (9.4 per cent in primary schools and 7.3 per cent in secondary schools) is less than half the national average, which is partly affected by the number of pupils from service families, none of whom are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is low (2.1 per cent in primary schools compared with 2.7 per cent nationally and 2.9 per cent in secondary schools compared with four per cent nationally). Significantly fewer pupils are educated in special schools than is the case nationally in both the primary and secondary phases. Only 1.5 per cent of pupils are of ethnic minority origin compared with 12 per cent nationally.

Performance

19.   OFSTED inspection evidence and baseline assessment shows that the attainment of pupils on entry to primary schools is above the average found nationally and equivalent to that found in similar LEAs.[1]

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[1] Wiltshire's statistical neighbours are: Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, North Yorkshire, Dorset, Devon, Hampshire, Cornwall, Somerset and West Berkshire.

20.   At Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 is broadly in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics, but below the averages for similar LEAs. The progress made by pupils is below the national average in mathematics and well below in reading and writing. Girls outperform boys a little in mathematics and considerably so in reading and writing.

21.   At Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 in English, mathematics and science is broadly in line with national averages. In English, the proportion is in line with that in similar LEAs, but below them in mathematics and science. The progress made by pupils is below the national average in mathematics and well below in English and science. Girls significantly outperform boys in English, but in science and mathematics their performance is broadly similar.

22.   At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 in English, mathematics and science is above the national average and is in line with the average in similar LEAs. The progress made by pupils is in line with the national average in English and science, but below in mathematics. In 2000, girls outperformed boys in English and mathematics, considerably so in the former. In science, boys outperformed girls.

23.   The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSE grades and one A*-G grade at Key Stage 4 is above that found in similar LEAs and nationally. The discrepancy between the achievements of boys and girls is similar to that nationally. Since 1995, the rate of improvement in pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE and their average points score has been below the trends nationally and among similar LEAs.

24.   At the age of 18, pupils perform above the national average and the average in similar LEAs in advanced level GCE examinations. Performance in advanced GNVQ is average. Since 1995, the rate of improvement in pupils' average points score for A level has been broadly in line with the national trend.

25.   The progress of pupils between Key Stage 1 and 2 is below average, but between Key Stages 2 and 3 it is above average. Progress between Key Stage 3 and 4 is in line with the average.   Provisional results for 2001 supplied by the LEA suggest that performance at Key Stages 3 and 4 has continued to improve. Performance at Key Stage 1 has remained static, whilst performance at Key Stage 2 in mathematics has fallen slightly below the results achieved in 2000, in line with the national trend. However, performance at Key Stage 2 in English has fallen nearly two points below the 2000 results whilst, nationally, results have remained static.

26.   OFSTED inspection data indicate that the proportion of primary schools judged good or very good (69 per cent) is similar to the national average (70 per cent) but below the average in similar authorities (79 per cent). Evidence from the primary schools that have been inspected twice suggests that improvements have been made to the quality of education and management. The proportion of primary schools requiring much improvement is below that found nationally and matches that found in similar LEAs.

27.   For secondary schools, OFSTED inspection data shows that the proportion of secondary schools judged good or very good (73 per cent) is above the national average (67 per cent) but below the average in similar authorities (81 per cent). Evidence from middle and secondary schools that have been inspected twice suggests that improvements have been made to management and efficiency but that there has been a decline in quality of education and climate. The proportion of middle and secondary schools requiring much improvement is similar to the national average but above that found in similar authorities.

28.   Attendance is above the national average and in line with levels found in similar LEAs. Unauthorised absence is in line with levels in similar LEAs and below the national average in both primary and secondary schools. The rate of permanent exclusions from primary schools is average; for secondary schools it is well below the national average and below that for similar LEAs.

29.   Nine primary schools, two special schools, one middle school and one secondary school have been judged since 1993 to require special measures, including two that had previously been identified with serious weaknesses.   Seven schools have been removed from special measures in that time.   In addition, seventeen schools (sixteen primary schools and one middle school) have been classified as having serious weaknesses, of which eight have improved sufficiently to be removed from this classification.   Five primary schools are designated as underachieving.

Funding

30.   Wiltshire's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is in the lowest quarter of councils nationally; there are 22 LEAs with lower education SSAs. The council has consistently spent at or above the education SSA. The council's planned spending against the main SSA blocks for the current financial year (2001/2002) shows that the education budget matches SSA, social services is 18.5 per cent above its SSA and highways is 20 per cent below its SSA.

Education budget compared to SSA (1997-2002)

	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002
SSA (£m)	139.3	149.4	159.1	168.2	178.2
Budget (£m)	141.9	151.7	159.1	168.2	178.2
Budget as % of SSA	101.9%	101.5%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

31.   Total expenditure on the non-schools budget has increased since last year by £1.6 million owing to increased demands for home to college transport, and a move from grant funding for under fives. The resulting local schools budget for Wiltshire is £2625 per pupil, which is the fourth lowest in England

32.   The level of delegation in Wiltshire is slightly less than average at 86.1 per cent compared to 86.3 per cent in counties and 86.5 per cent nationally. The amount delegated to schools is £2260 per pupil compared to the county average of £2414 and the national average of £2546. There is only one LEA with a lower delegated amount per pupil.   Wiltshire retains money generally in line with or below the

averages for counties and nationally, although the amount retained for school transport is higher because of the nature of the county.

33.   There is a relatively low amount retained to provide for pupils with statements of special need. Central administrative costs have increased this year, owing mainly to accounting adjustments and a modest overspend, both of which have been reported to committee and are subject to close monitoring. Although still lower than average, spending on school improvement has steadily increased over recent years, reflecting the closer monitoring of schools and the need to support schools in difficulty. Funds retained for access are significantly less than average owing to the delegation of school meals to all schools. There are relatively high costs of existing premature retirements and fees for pupils at independent special schools; Wiltshire has net spending of £1 million for special provision in other LEAs, which is almost a 40 per cent increase on the previous year.

34.   Financial targets set by central government over recent years have been met, except for the percentage increase in age weighted pupil units for the current year. This was due to the need to provide schools in the Private Finance Initiative scheme with an increased allowance to meet the requirements of the contract. The council was granted a dispensation by the Secretary of State.

35.   Wiltshire's capital expenditure has grown significantly over the last five years from £2.3 million in 1997/1998 to £13.9 million in 2001/2002, achieved largely by drawing on extra funding streams such as contributions from building developers, the infant class size initiative and Private Finance Initiative.

Council structure

36.   The council has 47 members, comprising 28 Conservative, 13 Liberal Democrat, three Labour and three Independent. There was no overall control of the council between 1985 and 2000. At the time of the inspection, a largely traditional structure was in operation with education as one of three service committees and a policy and resources committee. A number of sub committees and working parties support the main committee, which shares responsibility for a joint children's working party with the social services committee. A scrutiny committee examines education and social services.

37.   Progress to adopt a new council structure has been slow. Under current proposals, there will be two executive members with education responsibilities, a scrutiny committee and an advisory panel on education. The latter will allow 'added members', such as diocesan representatives, to continue to play a valuable part in the local democratic management of education.

The Education Development Plan

38.   The Education Development Plan (EDP) provides a satisfactory programme for school improvement and it has been updated annually. A useful summary document is published that sets out the priorities and targets and gives a current assessment of the progress made in implementing the plan. The plan is based on a satisfactory audit, which is reflected in the priorities and activities. However, the

success criteria are not always focused sufficiently upon measurable and specific performance indicators.

39.   The plan has seven priorities:

- improve the standards of literacy and numeracy at all key stages;
- improve the rate of progress made by pupils across the curriculum;
- improve the effectiveness of teachers to challenge and meet the needs of pupils more consistently;
- raise the levels of confidence and competency of all teachers in the use of information and communication technology as a tool for teaching and learning;
- ensure a broad and balanced curriculum in all schools;
- improve the quality of leadership, management and governance; and
- on an annual cycle, audit school performance, set targets and monitor progress.

40.   There was an omission in the original plan of an audit and activities for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, but work on this aspect is included in the latest plan. Activities for special educational needs and for schools causing concern are woven across the priorities in the plan. Action research projects in schools and activities to develop collaborative projects between small schools give appropriate local themes for school improvement within the plan.

41.   Approval of the plan was conditional upon agreement on strategies to address the differences at Key Stage 2 between LEA targets and aggregated schools targets for 2002 of 12 points in English and five points in mathematics. The initial target setting process was based upon school information; a lack of reliable pupil level data in the LEA hindered a realistic assessment of what each school could achieve.

42.   Progress towards the targets set is variable. In 2000, results in Key Stage 2 English matched the target set in the Education Development Plan, although results in mathematics were two points below the target. Provisional results for 2001 supplied by the LEA show that performance has fallen by two points in English and by one point in mathematics. The Education Development Plan targets agreed for 2002 are unlikely to be attained; there is a further ten points to achieve in English and nine points in mathematics. New LEA guidance has been issued to schools on minimum expected targets for Key Stage 2 pupils in 2002 to address the gap.

43.   However, there has been steady progress at Key Stage 4. Results in 2000 for five A*-C and one A*-G grades at GCSE were close to target and provisional results for 2001 suggest that performance is slightly above target. There has been satisfactory progress towards the targets set for reducing exclusions and improving attendance.

Recommendation

- Ensure that the target setting process is based upon robust data of the attainment and progress of individual pupils collected and analysed by the LEA.

44. Satisfactory progress has been made in implementing the plan. Termly reviews of progress are made and incorporated into an annual review. Action research projects, based upon the development of Education Development Plan (EDP) priorities within classroom practice, are an effective method to support school improvement. Schools, either individually or in groups, can bid for support within the EDP priorities. Progress with the projects is reported termly and details of the work are disseminated to other schools.

45. Headteachers and other partners have been well consulted on the plan. In the school survey, 85 per cent of schools surveyed reported that the plan was relevant to the needs of schools. Work has begun on the new EDP and a timeline has been produced to ensure that development and consultation are completed by the due date.

The allocation of resources to priorities

46. The allocation of resources to priorities is satisfactory and improving. The Best Value Performance Plan presents stakeholders with a clear view of council priorities and expenditure reflects those broad priorities. Elected members have funded education at the Standard Spending Assessment level, whilst large increases in council tax have provided resources to meet the agreed improvements in other service areas. Work is in progress with the district auditor on local performance indicators to assist medium term financial planning and the identification of links between resource allocation and subsequent performance. General all-party agreement on priorities means that annual financial decisions are usually timely, enabling schools to make budget forecasts. Delegated budgets are well timed, but there have been some late changes to the Standards Fund which have caused problems to schools.

47. Budget management in education is sound, but vulnerable to external inflationary pressures, especially in transport and out-of-county provision for special educational needs. Planned and actual expenditure in the department have, to date, been very close. The levels of delegation and accountability are satisfactory and budget monitoring is good. Deficits in schools are generally moderate and well monitored. All schools with deficits have agreed recovery plans. Primary schools' balances have grown from around £3 million to over £6 million during the last three years. A range of sensible, supplementary strategies to address this issue was being discussed by the committee during the inspection.

48. Budget consultation is good and appreciated by headteachers and governing bodies, but opportunities for them to have an impact on decisions about the overall level of funding are limited. A particularly helpful booklet aimed at improving funding transparency has been well received and signals a welcome move away from an incremental approach to budget setting to one based on an analysis of need. The formula for resource distribution is, however, cumbersome. The number of factors is average, but most of these are sub-divided, often involve complex sub-formulae and do not reflect the current drive for transparency. The principle of using the formula to target resources is correct, but the small amounts of funding which are distributed by some elements can mean that the effort to allocate these resources is

disproportionate to the benefits that result. This is particularly true for aspects of special educational needs funding, where schools consider the formula to be irrelevant. An effective mechanism has been devised and implemented to enhance schools' financial autonomy, whereby matched Standards Funding requirements have been capped at last year's level. Schools can make their own decisions about accessing additional amounts by using their own delegated funds for matching, using clear and simple directions provided by officers.

Recommendation

- Carry out a systematic review of the formula to simplify it and to ensure that it is linked securely to educational priorities.

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49.   Changes in strategic priorities over recent years have been mirrored by adjustments in budgeting, none more clearly so than the targeting of resources to support schools in difficulty. The LEA now has excellent data on such costs, but it has not fully analysed these in order to inform future support strategies. The value for money of spending sums in excess of £300,000 on some schools in difficulty has not been examined in detail. The adoption of a Private Finance Initiative scheme to provide extra capacity and replacement schools at secondary level has brought significant improvements, but there is no agreed strategy for funding the annual charges whilst still meeting the government's targets for increased pupil level funding.

Best Value

50.   Corporate arrangements for carrying out Best Value reviews are satisfactory and have received an unqualified endorsement from the district auditor. The Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) works reasonably well as the council's key strategy statement and it is informed by views gathered from residents. It wisely follows guidance in having fewer, more strategic reviews over the five-year period and it is beginning to be used as a means by which resources can be allocated to need.

51.   However, the BVPP has some shortcomings; in education, the plan identifies only one weakness in the service area, thereby understating the level of resources required to effect improvement. The plan contains too few local performance indicators. However, the council is addressing this weakness by work with the District Auditor to develop indicators and by strengthening the links between individual, service and corporate plans in order to develop further performance management.

52.   School managers have a sound understanding of the principles of value for money, but their understanding of best value principles is limited. No systematic training for schools has been undertaken and the requirement for governors to state how they will apply best value principles is not monitored.

Recommendation

- Provide appropriate training to headteachers and governing bodies to assist them to apply, and report on their implementation of Best Value principles.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

53.   Management services in general are supporting school improvement. However, the absence of a clear strategy for inclusion and special educational needs is hindering the progress of schools and the ability of headteachers to concentrate upon raising standards. Whilst support for behaviour is unsatisfactory, that for attendance is good. Support for the development of information and communication technology is not yet contributing sufficiently to school improvement. The LEA was judged to be providing the appropriate level of support in three quarters of the schools visited and the support provided was nearly always effective.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

54.   The LEA's 'support and challenge' programme is satisfactory and has some strengths. Strategies for monitoring and intervention have been considerably sharpened in the last eighteen months as a result of a rise in the number of schools causing concern at that time and an acknowledged weakness in the early identification of problems in some schools in the past.

55.   A new, differentiated monitoring strategy was introduced in 2001 that places schools into one of five categories based on need. Categorisation of schools is reviewed annually against a published set of criteria that have been issued to schools. The lightest monitoring provides one half-day visit per year for target setting in schools where the process of school self-review is rigorous and well established. The other four levels provide between one day and two and a half days of visiting per year. This strategy is sound and ensures that support is targeted upon need. Notes of visit are provided to the headteacher, but these notes are not routinely sent to the chair of governors.

56.   A separate intervention strategy, placing identified schools in one of five levels, has been operational for a longer period and is effective. Intervention in schools is commissioned by the monthly meetings of the school review group (SRG) comprising officers from all relevant sections of the LEA. The progress made in schools subject to intervention is also considered by the 'review panel', comprising elected members and headteacher representatives. Schools placed in the highest two levels of monitoring are likely to be considered by SRG for intervention, but all LEA officers present information on any school for consideration by the SRG. This system ensures good co-ordination of knowledge about schools. Very thorough information is compiled both for the SRG and the review panel on the action taken in each school subject to intervention. Comprehensive data is available on the differentiated support provided to these schools, the deployment of support staff and the relative costs incurred for each school. The programme of 'support and challenge' is also subject to the scrutiny of an independent review group of headteachers and governors that made its first report to elected members in October 2001. Schools identified for intervention are subject to termly review. There is some inconsistency in the format of review reports and in the sharpness of judgements made.

57.   Whilst aspects of the monitoring and intervention system are relatively new, the policy is sound and proving effective. The number of schools placed in the four main levels of intervention has been reduced from 52 in 2000 to 34 in 2001. The majority of schools visited knew of the number of visits expected under the new monitoring arrangements, but the links between the monitoring and intervention strategies and the likely levels of support to be provided was less clear to them. The increased differentiation of monitoring, intervention and support presents additional challenges to ensure that the LEA maintains good intelligence on the current position and development of each of its schools.

58.   In the majority of schools visited, the challenge and support given by the link adviser is judged to be effective. There is some useful development work in progress with advisers to compile sharp hypotheses from the available LEA data that can then be tested in the schools.

59.   Support to help schools to develop their own systems of self-review and evaluation is satisfactory. Three-quarters of primary schools and over half of secondary schools have completed training for self-review. The LEA document that sets out the intervention strategy also contains a good set of materials to assist headteachers and governing bodies in completing a school self-review as the basis for a discussion with the link adviser. School visits provided evidence of some good applications of self review in schools and effective work by link advisers working with teachers on joint class observations to strengthen school based monitoring and evaluation.

60.   The school improvement and support branch comprises a relatively small team of advisers and consultants with a satisfactory range of expertise. Staff are well deployed within and across the primary, secondary and curriculum teams according to the priorities and activities in the Education Development Plan, which forms the principal focus for the planning of the service. Leadership and direction of the teams is sound, but the range of responsibilities held by some staff is large. Priority in deployment is rightly given to the 'support and challenge' programme and

the needs of schools identified for intervention. Good use is made of a small team of headteachers and deputy headteachers to support schools requiring intervention. Performance management of staff appropriately applies the principles of Investors in People in a process of annual appraisal and six monthly review; work is in progress to incorporate the new national arrangements for performance management in advisory services.

61.   Centrally retained expenditure on school improvement in Wiltshire at £21 per pupil is below that found in similar LEAs (£23) and nationally (£26). A Best Value review of school improvement and intervention has begun with a target to report in May 2002. The service gives satisfactory value for money and has the capacity to improve further.

Collection and analysis of data

62.   The collection and analysis of data are unsatisfactory, but plans for improvement are being progressed. For many years, Wiltshire has had a relatively high level of mobility and turbulence in its pupil population caused mainly, but not entirely, by a significant presence in the area of families from the armed services. The absence of a detailed analysis of the effects of this turbulence on attainment and progress of both pupils and schools is a weakness in the process of target setting and the LEA's 'support and challenge' programme. In the school survey, one-sixth of primary schools and one quarter of secondary schools reported that the quality of data was poor. In all but one of the schools visited during the inspection, support for the provision and use of performance data was judged to be unsatisfactory.

63.   Data used for target setting by the LEA relies currently on the prior attainment of a cohort of pupils. In some schools, that cohort will be significantly different by the end of the key stage. Many schools therefore have more recent data on their individual pupils than the LEA and so link advisers have to check individual pupil data at the school level when agreeing targets with the headteacher and governing body. The LEA has carried out an analysis of the progress of schools between Key Stages 1 and 2 over the period 1998/2000, which shows that primary schools in the county have made better progress than junior and middle schools.

64.   There are also weaknesses in the transfer and analysis of data across branches of the education and libraries department, and between the department and other departments of the council, mainly due to the lack of the application of suitable electronic systems.

65.   A pupil database is being constructed and is expected to become operational in 2002, allowing individual pupils to be tracked within and across schools. Data will then be available not only to sharpen the challenge that the LEA is able to give to schools, but also to ensure that the differentiated systems of monitoring and intervention are supported by reliable and robust data.

66.   Nevertheless, there have been improvements in the provision of data over the last two years. Schools are provided with comparative performance data for schools of similar types and for Wiltshire as a whole. Schools visited, found this data valuable. No value added data is available for Key Stages 1 and 2, but value added data for GCSE and for post 16 qualifications has been developed through a contract with another LEA. Schools find this value added data arrives too late to influence significantly the review and target setting process in the autumn term.

67.   Good practical training has been provided for just over half the county's primary schools on the analysis and application of the Department for Education and Skills autumn package and further training is arranged. The LEA has worked with a number of headteachers and teachers to produce a range of good, clear guidance documents on the analysis and application of data across the key stages and these provide very useful case studies of successful work in progress in various schools.

Support for literacy

68.   The quality of much of the LEA's support for literacy is high, but its effectiveness is variable and the outcomes are not satisfactory. The principal weaknesses in the implementation and management of the National Literacy Strategy are poor targeting and poor coverage. Whilst primary schools place Wiltshire' support for literacy in the lowest quarter of LEAs surveyed, several schools, which have received intensive support, can demonstrate the success of that support.

69.   There has been considerable variability in the progress of cohorts receiving intensive support. One cohort of 30 schools made four per cent greater progress than other schools in the LEA, improving by 12 per cent overall. Another cohort of 20 schools made only 6.6 per cent progress over the year, less than the average for other LEA schools.

70.   In both reading and writing at Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 and above is in line with the national average, but below that in similar LEAs; the rate of improvement is below the national trend. At Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above is in line with the averages in similar LEAs and

nationally up to 2000. However, the rate of improvement has been below average compared to similar LEAs and nationally. Provisional results in 2001 show a reduction greater than that nationally. The aggregated schools' target for 2002 is low at 72 per cent and is 12 percent below the LEA target for 2002. At Key Stage 3, attainment in English at Level 5 or above is better than the national average and the rate of improvement matches the national trend. However, the attainment of girls markedly and consistently exceeds that of boys; at Key Stage 3, the difference is 18 per cent.

Recommendation

- Ensure that the variation in attainment in English between boys and girls is addressed in the new Education Development Plan.

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71.   There are specific weaknesses in the support for literacy. The literacy team has, until recently, been under strength and there have been several team changes. Schools have experienced difficulty with the discontinuity and report that some advice received has been contradictory. The LEA has a weakness in its provision of data to challenge schools in target setting. There have also been some cases where poor management in the schools has not been challenged and this has hindered the work of the literacy consultants.

72.   The LEA has taken steps to address these weaknesses. Although it is still short of one full-time consultant, the literacy support team has the necessary expertise and the quality of its planning is now good. The planning and published materials to support development in Key Stage 3 are imaginative and practical. The contribution of a number of leading teachers should strengthen the team further. To address weaknesses in target setting, a member of the literacy team will accompany the link advisers on the target setting visits to primary schools, using the new strategy of minimum expected grades. Twenty-one small schools have begun to work in four geographical groups, each led by a nominated headteacher and each with a literacy development plan, which links into the consultant's plan. This practical approach, which is not expensive in terms of the time of the consultant, has considerable potential.

Recommendation

- Ensure that the literacy support team is kept up to strength and that the effectiveness of its work is evaluated regularly.

Support for numeracy

73.   Support for numeracy is satisfactory with good support being given in the primary phase. The Education Development Plan contains a sound strategy for the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy, based on a detailed audit and analysis of local need. Evidence from schools indicates that support is good, although there has not yet been a resultant rise in standards. The introduction of the numeracy strand in the Key Stage 3 strategy has been satisfactory and received

positively by schools. The numeracy team is well led, provides effective training and consultancy, and is highly regarded by the majority of schools.

74.   Key Stage 1 results for 2000 were in line with national averages and slightly below statistical neighbours. Standards at Key Stage 2 were in line with national averages, but fell below those of the LEA's statistical neighbours. Provisional results from the LEA indicate that the 2001 LEA target has not been achieved and that a nine per cent increase will be needed to meet the 2002 target. The absence of LEA pupil level data means that the ability to set and monitor specific year-on-year curriculum targets for individuals and groups of pupils is hindered, thereby reducing the LEA's power of challenge.

Recommendation

- Guide and support schools in the setting of year-on-year numeracy targets for individuals and groups to secure improvements in the rate of progress as pupils move through the key stages.

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75.   Three-quarters of schools with primary age pupils have benefited from intensive support for numeracy in the last three years. This work has been effective. In the first year of the numeracy strategy, the schools targeted showed a 13 per cent rise in attainment at Key Stage 2, compared with an improvement of 4.7 per cent in other schools. In the primary schools visited, support for numeracy was judged to be mainly good and the LEA's impact on standards was judged to be significant in half. Schools value the practical approach of the numeracy team and the direct influence on the quality of teaching.

76.   A very satisfactory start has been made to the implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy. In the current year, 12 schools are being targeted for specific support and a further training programme is available for all other schools. Key Stage 3 results are above the national average. GCSE results at A*-C grades have shown a year on year improvement and, in 2000, were seven per cent above the national average.

Support for information and communication technology

77.   Support for information and communication technology (ICT) in schools in curriculum areas is poor; support for administrative ICT, although improving, is unsatisfactory. There is a lack of leadership and vision for the co-ordinated development of ICT and it is difficult to ascribe such progress as there is in schools to the LEA. The central, professional task of assessing the ICT needs of schools, evaluating their development and providing targeted support and guidance has been neglected. There is no strategy to monitor pupil and staff competencies in order to target improvements.

78.   The Education Development Plan priority for ICT aims to raise the levels of confidence and competence of all teachers in the use of ICT as a tool for teaching and learning. The plan proposes an impressive set of actions and targets, but progress towards them is unsatisfactory. Greatest progress has been in the delivery

of training and in collaborative work with the literacy and numeracy teams. Least progress has been made in helping schools to recognise precise levels of attainment in curricular ICT and what steps need to be taken to improve pupils' performance, teachers' competence and the quality of hardware and software in use by them. A proposed ICT scheme of work has been published for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 but there is no evaluation in progress to show how schools have applied this potentially useful guidance. A monthly email newsletter goes out to inform schools of good practice, but not all schools yet have an e mail address by which to receive it.

Recommendations

- Assess the levels of teachers' and pupils' competence in information and communication technology in order to target appropriate support; and

- evaluate the implementation and impact of the published schemes of work in order to plan future patterns of support.

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79.   There is no strategy for the National Grid for Learning that is recognised by schools and which is consistent with the LEA's corporate strategy and informed by a knowledge of schools' needs. Just over half of Wiltshire's schools are purchasing the Wiltshire version of the national ICT training programme. Whilst this training has been well received in many schools, schools did not find sufficient focus given to the process of teaching and learning.

80.   The majority of schools visited were highly critical about levels of support provided from the LEA. Many schools have not had ICT development plans scrutinised or approved. However, most schools reported that the LEA has negotiated good prices on hardware. The ratio of computers to pupils is just at the national average for both primary and secondary schools.

Recommendation

- In consultation with schools, urgently review the priorities for information and communication technology support in the curriculum and ensure these are incorporated into the new Education Development Plan.

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81.   Although there have been recent improvements in provision and direction for the administrative application of ICT, current performance is unsatisfactory. Electronic transfer of financial, pupil and staff data is not well developed. There is no clearly articulated strategy for ICT development that will improve schools' capacity to use ICT as a management tool, for the integration of administrative and pupil performance systems and to assist potential small school federations. The lack of overall leadership is impeding the various, often helpful, strands of operational activity from being drawn together into a coherent strategy for improvement.

Recommendation

- Urgently draw together current activities in information and communication technology into a coherent strategy for school improvement and ensure clear and co-ordinate leadership.

82. The provision of suitable information and communication technology systems within the education and libraries department is improving and there are discernible benefits, although these are, as yet, confined to a small number of sections. Trials of the pupil level school census procedures were adequately planned. All schools have a common suite of administrative software and the infrastructure is in place for the development of a pupil tracking system.

83. Schools express concern about the failure of the LEA to make significant progress on an e-mail project, which was started two years ago. On-line connections between schools and the LEA are poorly developed, thus hindering rapid transmission of data and information in this large rural county. Schools are unaware of any firm starting date for commencement of this county e-mail system. Schools are able to secure satisfactory technical support from a choice of external providers and a centrally managed contract.

Support for schools causing concern

84. The number of schools that have been identified in the categories of special measures and serious weaknesses has been relatively high, reflecting previous weaknesses in the identification of, and support for, those schools. These weaknesses have been addressed and support for schools causing concern is now good. Since 1993, thirteen Wiltshire schools have required special measures (two special, one middle, one secondary and nine primary schools). Two of these had previously been identified as having serious weaknesses. Seven of the others are no longer deemed to require special measures; six remain. One school took twenty eight months to be removed from special measures, but more recently, two schools have been removed much more quickly. In addition to the two schools already mentioned, seventeen others have been identified since 1997 as having serious weaknesses (one middle and sixteen primary schools). Eight have been removed from the category leaving nine. Between February 2000 and January 2001, five primary schools have been identified as underachieving.

85. The LEA has a sound strategy, developed in consultation with schools, that defines the respective responsibilities of the schools and of the LEA. It makes appropriate and clear distinctions about levels of concern and sets out the tariff of support for schools at different levels. Schools are familiar with the strategy, although not all are clear about the particular level to which they have been allocated. Three different groups, involving officers and members, drive the LEA's work in this area and monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. The progress of schools causing concern is regularly reviewed.

86.   In the school survey, schools rated support for schools, where there are concerns about performance, as satisfactory. However, when visited, schools thus categorised who had been in receipt of support rated it highly in the main. Link advisers, working with the intervention strategy manager, have clearly been instrumental in effecting major and rapid improvement in the two schools recently removed from special measures and the one no longer suffering from serious weaknesses. LEA intervention has been well tailored to fit the needs of particular schools. Prompt action to draft in experienced headteachers and deputies, rework action plans in concert with schools to make them fit for purpose and commission support for weak areas of teaching have transformed these schools. Drafting in additional experienced governors has been another important measure contributing to improvement. Support has also been highly effective in schools categorised by the LEA itself as requiring additional support. In all these cases, the LEA has also put in place appropriate exit strategies.

87.   However, such good support is not cheap in time or money. A significant sum has been spent on removing one school from special measures and some concerns have been voiced in schools about assessing the impact of taking headteachers and teachers out of successful schools to support those in difficulties.   Monitoring and sustaining the interventions is not yet foolproof; in one school, staff seconded to rescue the school were then left to manage the situation themselves and no support was provided for behaviour issues.

Recommendation

- Monitor the effectiveness and impact of intervention arrangements closely.

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88.   It is clear that in the past, some schools were allowed to slip into disarray. Equally clearly, the LEA now has much better information about schools, much better monitoring and an effective system in place to intervene should that be necessary. Intervention in its current form has proved to be very effective.

Support for governors

89.   The LEA gives governors good support. The small support team has clear aims, which focus on the development of autonomy in schools and the facilitation of high quality training matched to governors' needs. The LEA is clear about what expertise is available 'in house' and will, when necessary, broker alternative suppliers. The support team is appropriately represented on the school review group, and the LEA has helped strengthen governing bodies of some schools by the appointment of additional governors.

90.   The governors' support team has produced a good variety of training media to meet the needs of different governors; these include distance learning packs, CD ROMs and a series of 'DIY' training kits. Helpful publications have been produced and an informative newsletter is circulated. The support team is accessible and provides a rapid response service through the governors' helpline.

91.   The LEA does not provide a clerking service, but offers induction for clerks and continuing training for them, including the recent development of an advanced BTEC qualification. Procedures to ensure that LEA governor vacancies are filled are satisfactory. The number of non-LEA vacancies is higher than national averages and the LEA is responding by running courses for potential governors, which have been well received.   Regular meetings are held to bring governors up to date with LEA developments affecting their schools. An independent Wiltshire Association of Governors (WAG) represents a majority of Wiltshire governing bodies. WAG has very positive relationships with the LEA.

Support for school management

92.   Support for management is satisfactory and has some strengths. There has been clear improvement in the management and efficiency in the schools reported in OFSTED inspections. Just over three-quarters of the schools surveyed reported support to the headteacher and senior staff to be satisfactory or better.

93.   The LEA has a well-planned development strategy for school leadership that exemplifies good, practical ideas.   Three-quarters of primary schools have completed training for school self-review and further training is planned. Some good support has been given to management in schools that are a cause for concern. The LEA trains and co-ordinates a team of head and deputy headteachers to support improvement in these schools.   The National Professional Qualification for Headteachers and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers are well supported. There is a good scheme for the mentoring of new headteachers to the county, which has received very positive external evaluation.

94.   There is a wide and varied programme of continuing professional development available to schools by purchase from an open menu. If the required expertise is not available, alternative sources are brokered. This arrangement is sound.   The Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon initiative for staff training (GWIST) consortium, that includes the three LEAs and the two universities of Bath and Gloucestershire, also provides a range of professional and curriculum development opportunities for teachers.   All primary and special schools and two-thirds of secondary schools purchase some support from the menu. The LEA publishes a twice-termly *'Journal of Education'* to disseminate good practice and to celebrate achievement. It contains examples of effective action research projects based on Education Development Plan priorities. The LEA is yet to agree a strategy to co-ordinate the expertise in its Beacon and specialist schools to support school improvement across the county.

95.   The LEA meets its statutory responsibilities for religious education and the standing advisory council for religious education. The 'agreed syllabus' for religious education was revised in 1999 with full integration of multi-faith issues within it. Policy guidelines for religious education and for collective worship have been produced.

96.   A well-planned induction programme is offered to newly qualified teachers. The LEA tackles much of its **recruitment and retention** work through GWIST. There are some pressures on recruitment in Wiltshire; these tend to be more

pronounced in the east of the county. There is an imaginative approach provided by a major building company in providing housing for staff on a mixed mortgage/rent basis in connection with the building of a new primary school. The LEA is exploring arrangements for a recruitment pool for teachers in consultation with schools. Wiltshire has run professional development courses for supply teachers for the last two years.

Support for early years

97.   Support for early years is satisfactory. A sound development plan and financial strategy for early years development are in place. Currently the majority of places for three-year-olds and a small, but increasing, proportion of places for four-year-olds is in non-maintained, private and voluntary early education settings. Challenging targets to increase places are included in the early years development plan. Schools are not clear, however, about the planning of places and the impact on provision in their locality.

98.   Partnership working is good. Working practices have been effectively developed and the links between the early years development and childcare partnership (EYDCP) and the LEA are well established. Good joint work is evident with social services and health partners as well as with the pre-school learning alliance (PSLA).

99.   The quality of provision in all sectors is monitored systematically by the LEA advisory team and the PSLA. They provide relevant and timely support, advice and training as part of the EYDCP training strategy. The LEA team provide good training in the foundation stage curriculum. The sharing of good practice is helping continuity and progression between early years settings and the reception year in primary schools.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

100.   Corporate planning in Wiltshire is satisfactory. Developing a learning society is one of the Council's five strategic goals set out in the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). Education and school improvement is one of five priorities in the BVPP, which has clear links with the Education Development Plan (EDP). Council departments are beginning to use Best Value approaches to planning and in the reporting of progress.

101.   Education service plans reflect the priorities of the BVPP and the EDP. The EDP itself makes little reference to overall council objectives. Plans are evaluated and monitored by the senior management team on a monthly basis and reported to members through the BVPP review process.   However, the plans of individual services are insufficiently focused on clear success criteria and measurable targets. This impedes the development of personal performance targets and reduces the effectiveness of the performance management system, which is based on Investors in People principles.

102.   There is a positive commitment to education in the council. The chief executive has a clear understanding of national and local education issues and maintains a close involvement in developments. The chief education officer is one of five corporate chief officers. Education is fully represented in corporate decision-making.

103.   There is cross-party agreement on the main priorities for education. Officers provide clear and helpful reports and other information for members. Senior elected members have a sound understanding of education matters and their priority is to raise standards. They give satisfactory leadership on decisions for implementing the council's plans. Members and officers understand their respective roles and responsibilities.

104.   Many members of the education committee are governors and they have a particular concern for the progress of their local schools, but a significant number of schools are unclear about members' priorities for education.   Members are committed to retaining most of the small primary schools in the county as key parts of their local village community. However, they have not yet given clear direction by agreeing a strategy for support to small schools that also identifies the consequences for all schools in the county. Pilot schemes are being explored, including the federation of several schools and the provision of a range of community services within the school premises.

105.   The education and libraries department is organised into five branches: planning and resources; pupil and student services; school improvement and support; libraries and heritage; and youth and community services. Plans are under way to integrate the children and families branch of social services with education from April 2003. There is strong political and officer support across the council for the successful completion of this development, which offers good potential to provide integrated services to young people in the county.

106.   The LEA acknowledges that relationships with its schools in the recent past were poor.   The chief education officer, appointed in January 2000, has provided good leadership, and the management provided by other senior officers is responding well to this lead.   His first priority has been to re-establish the respect and confidence of schools. Most schools appreciate and support his efforts to become quickly knowledgeable about their concerns.   There is clear educational direction and a high profile is given to the roles and responsibilities of schools and the LEA in partnership.   Many schools report an improvement in service as a result, but a number still feel that parts of the LEA need to adapt to reflect the new relationship required between the LEA and its schools. There is a genuine attempt to involve schools in decision-making through, for example, involving headteachers in senior LEA appointments. In improving consultation, procedures have become cumbersome and there is now a determined effort to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Recommendation

- Simplify consultative mechanisms and ensure all partners are clear about the education policies and priorities of the council.

Partnerships with external agencies and other local government departments

107.   The LEA has successfully established good and effective links with a range of partners. The authority has a strong commitment to the newly established learning and skills council (LSC) and the Connexions network. The LEA contracts its adult and community education through local colleges of further education.   This arrangement allows the integration of LEA and LSC funding to secure coherent planning and provision. A very effective partnership has been set up through the Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon initiative for staff training, which delivers a range of courses for education managers and offers consultancy services to schools.

108.   Liaison with the health, police and social services is strong at strategic level, although some schools report weaknesses at the operational level. Services are clear about their responsibilities for multi-agency support to pupils. The LEA works closely with the youth offending team and drugs action team whose members value the support and guidance of education officers. Relationships with the teachers' professional associations are strong, and their representatives welcome the positive support they receive from elected members.

109.   Very strong relationships have been established with the local dioceses. Diocesan officers are consulted regularly about issues pertaining to their responsibilities and they are fully briefed on all relevant education matters.

Management services

110.   Arrangements for securing and assuring the quality of management support services are good. Schools in Wiltshire are used to exercising their autonomy and *'The Right Choice for Your School'* booklet enhances that ability by offering a range

of services, clearly priced and available 'a la carte' to supplement the mixed economy of service providers which has already evolved. A list of supplementary providers has been circulated that includes the contact numbers of schools willing to endorse the quality of services received. The school services board, appropriately chaired by a headteacher, systematically collects customer views, scrutinises service development plans, undertakes a regular review of services and reports its findings to elected members.

111. However, the same quality of information about service standards and performance is not provided for all non-traded services. Improvements to many services are being impeded by shortcomings in the application of information and communication technology.

Recommendations

- Ensure that non-traded services are subject to the same level of specification and rigorous scrutiny that is applied to traded services.

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112. **Financial services** are satisfactory, confirmed by visits to schools. A range of services is offered to suit the needs of schools and there are sensible arrangements to separate traded aspects from strategic needs so that this service, along with other key services, properly feeds intelligence to the school review group. School deficits are well charted and each school with a deficit has a recovery plan personally endorsed by the county Treasurer. Audit work is appropriately targeted and is well received by schools. Recent problems with the payroll service have been addressed.

113. The **personnel service** is satisfactory. Efforts have been concentrated on improving casework support and good progress has been made; the school services board reported that last year the personnel service was the most improved service in Wiltshire. Administrative tasks have not improved as quickly, but improvement plans are sound and timely.

114. Schools are able to access a range of in-house and externally recommended **property-related** services. This arrangement is satisfactory. The LEA has established a pooling system to help primary schools cope with their recently delegated extra responsibilities and this is working well. There is no compulsion to subscribe and schools in the scheme are told precisely what work has been done in all participating schools, thus enabling governors to make judgements on the cost effectiveness of membership.

115. Wiltshire direct services (offering **cleaning, catering** and **grounds maintenance** services) was privatised too late in the financial year for schools to make measured purchasing decisions. Schools were rightly critical of the position they faced and felt unsupported by the lack of clarity in the council's client role. As a result relationships with the council were damaged, although the position had improved by the time of the inspection. Furthermore, the implementation of the facilities management phase of the Private Finance Initiative project is uncovering difficulties in the previously successful client officer role. The current arrangements

are not able to respond quickly enough to routine, operational issues between contract staff and school managers.

Recommendation

- Review the client arrangements for the Private Finance Initiative operation to allow operational issues to be resolved quickly.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

116.   Wiltshire's strategy for special educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. The LEA is committed to inclusion and its draft policy builds on existing practice. However, it does not provide a clear definition of inclusion, which is recognised by schools and that includes social and special educational needs. The draft policy is aspirational, rather than a practical plan setting long term goals and specific actions.

117.   Moves have been made to draw together the LEA's policy for SEN, its published strategic objectives and the actions proposed, but the school survey and the visits to schools demonstrate that there is a lack of clarity about the LEA's purpose and plans for SEN.   Many schools report that the current policy and strategic objectives have had little impact upon their own development and that messages received from the LEA are both mixed and inconsistent.

Recommendation

- Urgently put in place a comprehensive strategy for special educational needs, which defines the LEA's intentions for inclusion, plans to resource and support that strategy and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the LEA and schools.

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118.   The council has approved the integration of the children and families service of social services with the education and libraries department from 2003. A new interim manager of the pupil and student services branch has been appointed from within the LEA. The branch has been restructured with this integration in mind and with an appropriate focus on inclusion and raising attainment. Many headteachers comment on some increased effectiveness as a result of these changes, but the full impact of the restructuring is yet to be recognised.

119.   There is a clear commitment from the LEA to work strategically in partnership with other agencies, especially social services and health. There are a number of projects in place with good potential to assist the integration between education and children's services. In one part of the county, a single 'family file' is being piloted. The 'Pathways Project' aims to improve the routes through the various services for vulnerable children.

120.   Wiltshire makes provision for special education in its six special schools, its 50 special learning centres and in mainstream schools. A review of special schooling was undertaken in 2000/2001, but implementation of its major proposals is still awaited and this is causing some frustration in schools. Currently there are gaps in LEA provision for primary pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities, and pupils on the autistic spectrum, leading to a significant number of pupils being placed in out of county schools. As a result, the council remains vulnerable to expenditure increases for these placements.

Statutory obligations

121. The LEA carries out its statutory duties satisfactorily. In 2000/2001 94 per cent of statements (including permitted exceptions) were completed in the recommended 18 weeks. The quality of statements is variable and there is scope for improvement in both clarity and specificity. The LEA gives insufficient information to parents for whose child statementing has been refused. Schools have been critical about the time taken to initiate statutory assessment and the LEA has now reviewed its criteria and procedures in order to speed up the process. In 2000/2001 seven appeals were concluded by the special educational needs tribunal; of these five were settled in favour of the LEA. It is only recently that headteachers have become involved in the panel deciding levels of support for stages four and five of the code of practice.

122. Arrangements for the annual reviewing of statements and the production of transition reviews are satisfactory. Officers attend annual review meetings if specific issues are raised and their input is valued; however a shortage of staff has meant that regular attendance as promised at 14 plus reviews is not always achieved.

123. The parent partnership service (PPS) is used and appreciated by an increasing number of parents. Information produced by the PPS in co-operation with the LEA is clear and easy to read. However, there is not a clear understanding between the LEA and the PPS of respective roles and responsibilities and this is adversely affecting the effective operation of the service.

Improvement and value for money

124. The LEA is not, at present, providing satisfactory support to schools to help raise the attainment of pupils with special educational needs. In two-thirds of schools visited, the support provided was unsatisfactory; in no school was it good.

125. A new system for providing support for special educational needs and access to education was put in place in September 2001. This brings together in local education teams a number of separate support groups, including psychologists, welfare officers and the behaviour support service. The four local teams share boundaries with social services and primary care teams. This development has considerable potential to provide integrated and responsive support to schools

through, for example, single assessment teams and audits of need. Schools agree with the principle of these teams, but schools rightly express concern that the success of the new teams will be affected, as in the previous structure, by shortages of support staff as a result of long term absence or by weaknesses in deployment. A lack of consultation with headteachers about the formation of these teams is being addressed by a design group, which includes headteachers and which will now monitor progress and offer feedback for future developments.

Recommendation

- Make vigorous attempts to cover long-term absences and ensure good staff deployment in the new local education teams.

126. Schools receive satisfactory support from teachers in the service for physically and sensory impaired pupils. Although the team is stretched, monitoring information suggests that the resource is well focused. The LEA provides an effective support network for special educational needs co-ordinators and good training for teachers and learning assistants. Good practice is being disseminated through model policies and school self-evaluation of special educational needs is being promoted. There are increasing numbers of examples of good outreach work from special schools.

127. Support from the education psychology service has been unsatisfactory. In the school survey, two-thirds of schools rated education psychology support as poor or very poor; this was the lowest rating of all LEAs surveyed so far. Steps are being taken to restructure the psychology service through local education teams, but this will only be effective if existing vacancies can be filled and the service brought up to its full complement. Psychologists are sometimes deployed away from work in schools to special projects; however valid this work is, it reduces availability for school support and undermines the focus on raising attainment.

Recommendation

- Take steps to monitor the quality and improve the deployment of educational psychologists within the local area teams.

128. Target setting for pupils who have special educational needs is largely based on individual education plans and statutory testing. As yet, this does not allow the LEA to set more sophisticated targets or compare the progress of similar pupils in different settings. The monitoring of special educational needs (SEN) provision for value for money has started in centres for pupils with specific learning difficulties (SpLD), and service level agreements are being negotiated with all special learning centres, but as yet there is insufficient evaluation of the progress of most pupils with SEN.

129. In 2000/2001, Wiltshire's total expenditure on SEN was around 12.6 per cent of the local schools budget, compared to statistical neighbour and national averages of 15 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively. Comparative figures are not available

for the current financial year. Central budget monitoring and control are sound and actual expenditure matches that planned. The additional educational needs factor within the delegation scheme is well targeted, but there are too many factors in the formula carrying relatively small amounts of money being distributed for other special needs with the result that their distribution is poorly understood. There is confusion in schools about which pupils qualify for a named allowance and why some statements bring no additional resources. Consequently schools tend to ignore these allocations when drawing up their SEN expenditure profiles. No schools report any external monitoring of their SEN expenditure by the LEA, and there are no agreed measures by which to assess value for money.

Recommendations

- Simplify the factors in the funding formula for additional educational needs; and

- put in place a rigorous system for monitoring and analysing the use and effectiveness of delegated special educational needs funds by schools and special learning centres, and ensure that the results of this analysis are shared with schools.

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130. The LEA is being rightly challenged by its schools to clarify the strategic direction of its special needs provision and to improve the quality of its support for SEN. There is evidence that the team now managing SEN is beginning to take positive steps towards meeting these challenges. The LEA has the capacity to improve provided it identifies a clear long-term strategy and involves its schools in the planning and implementation of that strategy.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

131.   Wiltshire's overall performance in this function is satisfactory. Statutory and routine duties such as the production of the school organisation plan, collection and use of pupil forecast data and consultations with diocesan representatives are performed well. The district auditor's reports are positive and recommendations are acted upon promptly. Negotiations with housing developers have been particularly well managed and have already resulted in the provision of three new primary schools to serve areas of increased housing provision. Sound plans are in hand to provide for the medium term increase in secondary pupils, including the recent opening of a new school under the Private Finance Initiative scheme, together with agreed enlargements to appropriate existing schools. The infant class size pledge has been implemented.

132.   Spare capacity is unexceptional with overall surplus places in line with recommended practice. However, 21 per cent of primary schools have more than 25 per cent surplus places. This is above the upper quartile for all LEAs and largely reflects the fact that a quarter of primary schools in the county have fewer than 90 pupils and serve isolated village communities. This is a key issue for Wiltshire and previous actions to address it have been sporadic. The fact that a significant number of small schools are aided, and that a recent closure proposal failed have resulted in the council adopting an understandable, if over cautious, approach to the issue. The chief education officer has taken a personal lead and has made a firm commitment to take action. Work on an analysis of unit costs is in progress with the district auditor. Headteachers and governing bodies of small schools are being encouraged to explore a range of approaches that ensure viability and reduce unit costs.

133.   The LEA's response to two previous reviews on the future of the two areas of three-tier provision in the county was indecisive. The resulting uncertainty and anxiety in associated schools is unsatisfactory. Senior members and officers show an unanimity of view that this situation has continued for too long and that the issue requires resolution. The latest consultation documents, whilst seeking properly to be even-handed, present the 'status quo' as the first option, without explaining fully the consequences.

Recommendation

- Following the present consultation, put forward proposals for education in the present areas with three-tier schooling that provide long-term stability for schools.

Admissions

134.   The LEA carries out its admissions function well and provides good value for money; its costs are the second lowest in the southwest LEA benchmarking group. Schools are generally satisfied with admissions arrangements and the number of parents who get their first preference is very high, although the LEA does not have

data from the many schools where it is not the admissions authority. There are 90 admissions authorities with whom the LEA has developed good working practices. The geography of Wiltshire reduces the incidence of potential admissions problems in that for many communities there is one primary school per village and one secondary school per town; historical patterns of admission are therefore well established.

135.   Nevertheless, officers have a keen understanding of their, often, conflicting roles in pupil advocacy, advice to schools and regulation and have skilfully developed positive relationships. Information for parents is clearly laid out and has been improved in line with the recommendations of the district auditor. Further improvements are planned, such as provision of a summary in minority languages. Apart from some confusion over definitions of catchment areas, admissions criteria are clear and fair and the LEA rightly provides advice to other admissions authorities on their published criteria. Relationships with the dioceses are good. The admissions forum is working well, although increased representation of community schools is properly being examined. The number of appeals is very low and these are dealt with in appropriate timescales.

136.   The rural nature of the county means access to education is significantly affected by school transport, which costs over £8 million per year and it is the biggest single item of centrally held education expenditure in Wiltshire. Control and management of the budget for transport are good in a difficult situation where price increases regularly exceed inflation. Comparative costs are in line with statistical neighbours. Innovative work to foster better communications with schools and the involvement of pupils in drawing up behaviour codes when travelling are being developed.

Asset management planning

137.   Asset management planning has been tackled well with few areas of weakness, none of which are major. Wiltshire has managed its capital budgets consistently well and all the high priority work within the £47 million backlog identified by the condition survey has been completed. Schools have been provided with a useful schedule of further priority work, including information on funding streams to help their planning. The Department for Education and Skills has praised aspects of the asset management plan (AMP). Workshops for heads and governors have been both popular and well received, enabling schools to carry out their own suitability surveys with subsequent moderation by officers. The AMP forum gives representative heads a useful opportunity to influence strategy, although the mechanism for feeding back outcomes to all heads is not robust. Visits confirmed satisfaction in schools with both the planning and the implementation phases where work was generally on time and within budget.

138.   Organisational structures are sound and there is good co-ordination between officers. However, there is no strategy to enable schools to improve their asset management capabilities. The development of a self-help building project scheme is a good start, but staffing capacity inhibits systematic liaison between schools and the LEA. Furthermore, mechanisms for the exchange of data are an impediment to a greater integration of schools' own building plans with the LEA's AMP.

Recommendation

- Develop the capacity of schools to manage their property assets, particularly by sharing and updating property data, agreeing the funding streams from school and LEA sources, and by ensuring that school priorities are consistent with the priorities in the asset management plan.

Provision of education other than at school

139.   Education other than at school (EOTAS) is unsatisfactory, though there are some strengths in both the strategy and the provision. In the school survey, advice on exclusion was rated as just satisfactory, whilst both alternative provision for pupils out of school and support for pupils who are out of school but not excluded were rated as unsatisfactory. The district auditor's report of October 2000 expressed concern about the number of excluded pupils spending prolonged periods without any education followed by significant periods in part-time education because of a lack of suitable alternative provision.

140.   The current picture shows some improvement in provision, although not enough. There has been a creditable reduction in permanent exclusions from 107 in 1997/1998 to 55 in 1998/1999 (a 48 per cent reduction compared to national reduction of 15 per cent) and 63 in 2000/2001. Moreover, forty-four of these children were reintegrated in 2000. However, the overall figure for children educated other than at school remains high. One hundred and twenty three children are educated at home and the LEA has satisfactory arrangements for supporting and monitoring these. In September 2001, 115 children were out of school for other reasons. Arrangements for those with medical reasons, 56 in all, are satisfactory, but the bulk of the remainder receive only five hours home tuition per week.   Moreover, in some cases, the LEA has great difficulty in establishing with any certainty either the whereabouts of the children or the details of the provision they are receiving.

141.   The LEA's policy for EOTAS rightly focuses on helping schools to become more autonomous in managing behaviour and has contributed to the reduction in exclusions. At Key Stages 1 and 2, the behaviour support team works in schools with pupils at risk of exclusion. At Key Stage 3, this work is done by the Young people's support service (YPSS).   At Key Stage 4, there are alternative work related programmes for disaffected pupils developed in collaboration with Trident and other providers. In three of the schools visited, preventative work done in school by the YPSS (secondary) or the behaviour support team (primary) was judged of high quality and effective in preventing exclusion. In a further four schools, the YPSS was ineffective, or it had been unable to offer the support required. Significant gaps in provision for EOTAS remain, including staffing gaps caused by sickness. These have led to a credibility gap with many schools and a lack of clarity about the precise nature of the current arrangements; two of the schools visited believed that the pupil referral units had been closed, whereas they have been re-organised into one body with satellite annexes.

142.   The YPSS is working, with a good multi-agency approach, to ensure that pupils out of school have access to accredited provision. In 2000/2001 there were 116 such pupils catered for by the YPSS. Thirty sat GCSEs, of whom sixteen secured A-G grades and four gained five or more A*-C grades. Though these results are satisfactory for some pupils, the LEA is not able to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision it is making for the majority of those pupils educated other than at school.

143.   The LEA is not in a position to plan effectively for the move to 25-hour provision. The budget for EOTAS has been greatly augmented to enable new arrangements to be made, but very little is yet in place. There is a sound overall strategy focused on the development of the work related curriculum, on-line learning, college links and personal advisers and mentors, but there is no clear plan indicating how the LEA intends to move from the present fragmented and unsatisfactory provision to where it needs to be to comply with its statutory obligations by September 2002.

144.   Overall, the arrangements for EOTAS are poorly managed. The principal deficiency is the absence of proper management information. Weaknesses in collection and monitoring of data make it impossible to put together a clear and accurate picture of the current situation, fully assess the impact of the work that is being done or to plan realistically for the move to 25 hours provision, nor is the LEA in a position to judge whether its current arrangements offer value for money.

Attendance

145.   The LEA has an effective strategy for promoting regular school attendance. Attendance rates, in both, primary (94.9 per cent) and secondary schools (92.4 per cent) are above the national average (94.3 per cent and 91.4 per cent, respectively). Authorised and unauthorised absence in both phases is below the national average.

146.   The education welfare service (EWS) is well run. There is a very clear service level agreement with schools, which is monitored regularly. The service is pursuing a strategy to support the management of attendance by the school. Revised criteria for referral have been shared with schools to support better focussed work in areas where unauthorised absence is relatively high. A 'red alert' panel meets every two weeks to consider urgent cases. Partnership with the Wiltshire youth offending team and the police has resulted in a truancy watch protocol. Two of Wiltshire's documents on good practice in promoting attendance have been circulated nationally.

147.   Schools that have had continuity in their contact with the EWS are almost universally positive in their comments on the quality of the service received. Forty two per cent of secondary schools and 25 per cent of primary schools surveyed reported that the support for promoting a high level of attendance was good or very good. Changes in the allocation of education welfare officers, or long-term absences in the EWS team have weakened the impact of the service in some schools. The EWS team is now incorporated into the new local education teams.

Behaviour support

148.   Support for behaviour is unsatisfactory. The LEA is changing its provision for supporting behaviour. The present arrangements have weaknesses, the new structures are still incomplete and the strategy is not clear to schools.

149.   For the last six years, primary schools have had access to the services of the Behaviour Support Service (BSS) that comprises four teachers and seven support assistants in 2001. This team works with pupils in school who are at stage three of the Code of Practice. The training provided by BSS aims to help schools to manage behavioural problems more effectively. Inevitably, that level of resource is spread thinly and unevenly across this large, rural county. In the school survey, 38 per cent of primary schools reported support for behaviour to be poor. However, when schools have had support from BSS, their work has been effective.

150.   Secondary schools obtain support for behaviour from the young people's support services (YPSS). This service has focussed particularly on Key Stage 3 pupils, but the previous arrangements to work with pupils for a three-week period out of schools were not backed by adequate support on their return. The focus has now been changed to provide support working with the pupil in schools. In the school survey, 62 per cent of secondary schools reported support for behaviour to be poor; however, several schools visited had received good help from individual members of the service. The YPSS is overseen by a representative board that includes headteachers, but there has been a difference of opinion between headteachers as to the most effective means of support.

151.   The formation of the new local education teams from autumn 2001 has integrated the BSS into multi-agency working that has the potential to provide a better service of support to schools. The YPSS is not presently part of the LETs because the LEA has rightly been exploring methods of providing alternative curriculum provision for pupils at Key Stage 4 that will integrate the working of staff in

the LEA support services with the Connexions service and other agencies.   This proposed development is yet to be resolved with partnership groups.

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Recommendation

- Improve the response to the needs of young people close to exclusion through closer work with the developing Connexions service.

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152.   Schools express concerns about the provision for pupils who are excluded from school. A new day centre in Calne is due to open in January 2002 that will explore the development of specialist short-term off-site provision for primary pupils. This development offers a sound model for potential replication elsewhere in the county.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

153.   The council takes reasonable steps to meet its responsibilities for health and safety. Suitable arrangements are in place for collecting and analysing incident data. The school survey showed general satisfaction with Wiltshire's arrangements; visits showed that some schools are very impressed with the advice they are given.

154.   Child protection procedures are satisfactory and are rated as such, or better, by schools. The approach is multi-disciplinary and the designated officer from education sits on the area child protection committee. Revised guidance has been produced and circulated. All schools have designated staff and some have designated governors. Most, but not all, are trained and the education department has just begun to monitor attendance at training. Schools are aware of procedures and contact numbers and generally confident in the system.

Children in public care

155.   Provision for children in public care in Wiltshire is satisfactory with some strengths. Liaison with social services is effective; there are some good innovative approaches and a high level of involvement by elected members. However, targets and attainment are low. Schools in both phases rate the support as satisfactory.

156.   There are 197 children of school age in public care in Wiltshire. In 2000/2001, four were excluded and these, together with two others, had customised programmes devised by the young people's support service, which are being carefully monitored. All schools have designated teachers and have had the offer of training. Ninety-four schools have taken up the offer to date. Children have personal education plans and targets have been set jointly by education and social services on the basis of prior attainment. These targets are not challenging. Nevertheless, progress is monitored and the arrangements are working well in the schools visited.

157.   A joint education working group, which includes foster carers and social services representatives, has a specific remit for the oversight of the education of children in public care. This group has run successful training for governors. There are two personal advisers with an advocacy, training, target setting and development

role, as well as a dedicated educational psychologist. Standards fund money is held centrally for crisis interventions. Through a corporate parenting group consisting of eight elected members and senior officers, members monitor the progress and attainment of children in public care. They also meet and listen to the children and champion them on occasion. Members also challenge officers and monitor their work closely.

Support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, including Travellers

158.   Support for ethnic minority children is satisfactory overall and support for Traveller children is good.

159.   Wiltshire has been home to Traveller communities for many years and the well established Traveller education service has very good knowledge of Traveller families. It supports and monitors the education of Traveller children effectively. Staff understand the issues around Traveller education and have developed good strategies for dealing with them through advice to schools and the LEA, home-school liaison, the provision of resources for schools and liaison with other relevant agencies.   There are good links with the primary advisers. Targets are set for individual Traveller pupils, some of whom achieve close to national standards at Key Stage 2. Attendance is monitored and individual attendance targets set for poor attenders. Schools visited with Traveller pupils rated the support of the service and its contribution to raising achievement highly.

160.   The small Wiltshire ethnic minority achievement service is charged with supporting the achievement of 278 minority ethnic children spread across a large county. Moreover, it has to do this on the basis of inadequate information about its clients. A considerable number of Wiltshire families are not prepared to disclose their ethnic origins and so the statistical data on ethnic minority achievement are inaccurate. Ethnic minority achievement service staff are relying on the forthcoming new guidance from the Department for Education and Skills based on the new census categories.   In the current context, target setting by ethnic origin is a meaningless exercise and, even when the figures are closer to reality, the groups will be too small to be statistically valid. Individual pupils are, however, set targets for language development.

161.   The service deploys its small resources to the best effect it can, providing assessment, teaching and monitoring for English as an additional language, advice and training to schools and teachers, fostering positive attitudes to diversity and developing home school links. Support is sensibly allocated on a 'greatest need' basis to schools and delivered within the mainstream. Progress is monitored regularly, using both language acquisition stages and national curriculum levels, and outcomes are satisfactory. Record keeping is good. The service is just developing links with the Key Stage 3 literacy strategy and has not had links with the literacy or numeracy strategies in the past. In the school survey, primary schools rated the support satisfactory, whilst secondary schools thought it unsatisfactory.

162.   The Ethnic minority achievement service is aware of the isolation of scattered minority ethnic pupils in this large rural county and has formed good links with the Wiltshire racial equality council and a PhD student working on the impact of racism

on isolated minority ethnic children. Through these contacts, some important anti-racist curriculum development work is now underway.

Gifted and talented pupils

163.   Support for gifted and talented pupils is still at an early stage, but research in 2001 showed that 127 schools were offering initiatives for these pupils and 80 schools have designated a co-ordinator. A model policy for the gifted and talented is being prepared, using good practice from three other LEAs. An adviser has responsibility for the development of support to gifted and talented pupils and has run a well-attended course in each of the last four years, which has resulted in some interesting classroom-based action research. A good range of courses have also been run on the challenge for the most able in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology and science; the latter requires a teacher to attend with an able pupil for practical activities. In summer 2001, three successful summer schools were held.

Measures taken to combat racism

164.   Measures to combat racism in schools are not adequate. Wiltshire's corporate response to the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has been the production of a statement of commitment to anti-racist practices and the working draft of an action plan in which the first actions are due to be in place by the end of September 2001. This is too little and too late. The evidence suggests that the council, rather than taking corporate ownership of the issue, has relied too greatly on the work of a single member of staff in the education and libraries department, who has now left Wiltshire. A proposal to take this work forward subsequently within education through the creation of a new post failed because of lack of applicants. The Wiltshire race equality council has now been contracted to develop work on the Commission for Racial Equality's document *'Learning for All'* and the response to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry in conjunction with the ethnic minority achievement service.

165.   Most, but not all, of the schools visited are aware of guidance from the LEA on the requirement to log racist incidents and are keeping logs but there is little evidence of other support or guidance for schools around issues of diversity or dealing with racism. Yet the education committee commissioned research in July 1999, which indicated that staff in schools needed increased understanding of race and cultural diversity issues and that expectations of minority ethnic pupils needed to be consistently high.

Recommendation

- Ensure that the LEA as a whole takes the lead on race issues and makes clear that valuing and understanding diversity should be an integral part of education in all schools, not just those with minority ethnic pupils.

Social exclusion

166.   The LEA's approach to social exclusion is satisfactory. It focuses on emotional literacy and social inclusion, defined as the promotion of the development of the whole young person within their local community. Five key principles underpin the areas for development; partnership, prevention, intervention, learning and multi-agency working. These key principles and the development areas are appropriate. Throughout there is a strong emphasis on co-operation and partnership with health and social services.

167.   Planning and development mechanisms for implementing the strategy are multi-disciplinary and appear to be working well. In particular, the pathways project, led by children's services with health and education as partners, is working to develop a more coherent deployment of services to enhance the life chances of vulnerable children. Various initiatives, such as 'children and young people first in Melksham' are helping to keep pupils in school. The youth service and careers are involved in developmental work with disaffected young people and the youth offending team are working to good effect with 20 young people who are out of school.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a number of recommendations. However, the following are fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

- urgently put in place a comprehensive strategy for special educational needs, which defines the LEA's intentions for inclusion, plans to resource and support that strategy and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the LEA and schools (paragraph 117).
- ensure that the introduction, and further development, of the pupil database has the highest priority in order to obtain better quality data for the sharper analysis and scrutiny of the attainment of pupils and the performance of schools (paragraph 65);
- urgently draw together current activities in information and communication technology into a coherent strategy for school improvement and ensure clear and co-ordinated leadership (paragraph 81).

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to improve the LEA's strategy for school improvement:
- ensure that the target setting process is based upon robust data of the attainment and progress of individual pupils collected and analysed by the LEA (paragraph 43);.
- carry out a systematic review of the formula for delegated funding to simplify it and to ensure that it is linked securely to educational priorities (paragraph 48); and
- provide appropriate training to headteachers and governing bodies to assist them to apply, and report on their implementation of, Best Value principles (paragraph 52).

In order to improve the strategies for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:
- ensure that any commissioned reviews of schools subject to intervention present sharp evidence and judgements to assist headteachers, governors and members of the review groups in monitoring and planning progress (paragraph 56);
- review the impact of the programme of monitoring and intervention at least annually and ensure that the intelligence and information collected for the School Review Group, and the subsequent action commissioned, is both accurate and speedy (paragraph 57); and
- draw the monitoring, intervention and support strategies into one simple document for easy reference by headteachers and governing bodies (paragraph 57).

In order to improve support for literacy and numeracy:
- review the systems for identification of need and targeting of support for literacy (paragraph 69);

- ensure that the variation in attainment in English between boys and girls is addressed in the new Education Development Plan (paragraph 70);
- ensure that the literacy support team is kept up to strength and that the effectiveness of its work is evaluated regularly (paragraph 72): and
- guide and support schools in the setting of year-on-year numeracy targets for individuals and groups to secure improvements in the rate of progress as pupils move through the key stages (paragraph 74).

In order to improve support for information and communications technology (ICT):
- assess the levels of teachers' and pupils' competence in information and communication technology in order to target appropriate support (paragraph 78);
- evaluate the implementation and impact of the published schemes of work in order to plan future patterns of support (paragraph 78);
- in consultation with schools, urgently review the priorities for information and communication technology support in the curriculum and ensure these are incorporated into the new Education Development Plan (paragraph 80).

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:
- monitor the effectiveness and impact of intervention arrangements closely (paragraph 87).

In order to improve strategic management and management services:
- simplify consultative mechanisms and ensure all partners are clear about the education policies and priorities of the council (paragraph 106);
- ensure that non-traded services are subject to the same level of specification and rigorous scrutiny that is applied to traded services (paragraph 111); and
- review the client arrangements for the Private Finance Initiative operation to allow operational issues to be resolved quickly (paragraph 115).

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:
- review, and seek a reduction in, the number of placements in out of county special schools as part of the LEA strategy for special education provision (paragraph 120)
- review and redefine the roles and responsibilities of the LEA and the parent partnership service to ensure that the operation is effective (paragraph 123);
- make vigorous attempts to cover long term absences and ensure good staff deployment in the new local education teams (paragraph 125);
- take steps to monitor the quality and improve the deployment of educational psychologists within the local area teams (paragraph126);
- simplify the factors in the funding formula for additional educational needs (paragraph129); and
- put in place a rigorous system for monitoring and analysing the use and effectiveness of delegated special educational needs funds by schools and special learning centres, and ensure that the results of this analysis are shared with schools(paragraph 129).

In order to improve access to education:
- following the present consultation, put forward proposals for education in the present areas with three tier schooling that provide long term stability for schools (paragraph 133); and
- develop the capacity of schools to manage their property assets, particularly by sharing and updating property data, agreeing the funding streams from school and LEA sources, and by ensuring that school priorities are consistent with the priorities in the asset management plan (paragraph 138).

In order to improve provision for pupils who have no school place or who are excluded:
- communicate clearly to schools the nature and purpose of the current arrangements for education otherwise than at school (paragraph 141);
- produce a sequenced and costed plan for the move to 25 hour provision for children out of school (paragraph 143);
- urgently develop effective electronic systems for collecting, storing and accessing information about children out of school, the provision made for them and their individual progress (paragraph 144); and
- improve the response to the needs of young people close to exclusion through closer work with the developing Connexions service (paragraph 151).

In order to improve action to combat racism:
- ensure that the LEA as a whole takes the lead on race issues and makes clear that valuing and understanding diversity should be an integral part of education in all schools, not just those with minority ethnic pupils (paragraph 165).

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the Local Education Authority concerned:

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A copy may also be downloaded from the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk