

Inspection report
WARWICKSHIRE
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: May 2003

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	Warwickshire Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	Education Department Warwickshire County Council 22 Northgate Street Warwick CV34 4SP
Lead inspector:	Robert Barr
Date of inspection:	May 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Warwickshire local education authority (LEA) 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 (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's 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 a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports; audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, the LEA's officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and the LEA's partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working and participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in July 1999). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 254 schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 89 per cent.
3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement that is converted into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria, (and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted), can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numerical grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numerical grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report, which comment on the individual functions, scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.
4. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.
5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc., whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

6. The socioeconomic context of Warwickshire is little changed from that at the time of the last inspection in 1999; it is a largely affluent shire county bordering the West Midlands. Nuneaton and Bedworth are still its largest pockets of high deprivation. The standards achieved by Warwickshire's pupils are mostly above national averages and in line with similar authorities¹. This is much the same picture as was found at the time of the last inspection. The steady improvement in pupils' attainment, while in line with that found nationally, is less than that anticipated at the time of the last inspection.

7. Warwickshire was an effective education authority at the time of its last inspection. It was well managed with particularly good relationships with schools. It had a clear view of the LEA's role in supporting school improvement and a purposeful and robust approach to challenge and intervention. Since the last inspection Warwickshire has continued to be principled, fair and honourable in its actions and has been at the forefront of many innovative developments in education, such as being a pilot authority for education strategic planning. Officers and members have worked effectively to implement the recommendations of the last inspection and improvement has been particularly strong in areas of previous weakness, all of which are now at least satisfactory. All aspects of support for pupils with special educational needs, previously unsatisfactory, have improved. While the general trend has been one of improvement, few functions have moved from satisfactory to good since the last inspection.

8. A highly satisfactory start has been made on implementing an ambitious strategic education plan. The plan is already providing a sound foundation for a more integrated broad based and coherent strategy for supporting school improvement. The vision and priorities for education are well understood and supported by headteachers, officers and members. Services to support school improvement are highly regarded by schools and their effectiveness remains highly satisfactory. The support and challenge for schools in all categories of cause for concern is particularly effective. However, the LEA has been too slow to change the way it supports, monitors, and challenges effective schools to exploit the potential provided by improved performance data. Too much support is provided to these schools as an entitlement.

9. The LEA discharges the majority of its functions well and many are good. There are particular strengths in:

- the quality of leadership provided by members;
- the quality of leadership provided by officers and of their advice to members;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion;
- support for early years;
- the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN);
- the effectiveness of corporate planning and decision making in respect of education;
- the extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities;

¹ Warwickshire's statistical neighbours are: Staffordshire, Cheshire, Leicestershire, Worcestershire,

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- the effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies;
 - support for raising standards in numeracy;
 - support for schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3;
 - the standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement;
 - the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools;
 - the effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in under-performing schools;
 - the effectiveness of the leadership, strategic management and performance management of services to support school improvement;
 - support for school governors; and
 - the effectiveness of the LEA's services to support schools' management of finances and human resources.

10. In almost all other areas the LEA provides satisfactory, and in many cases, highly satisfactory support. The two areas of weakness are:

- the extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements in relation to child protection; and
- the support for gifted and talented pupils.

11. Corporate management has improved from the already high base established at the time of the last inspection and provides a secure platform for further service improvement. The leadership provided by officers and members has strengthened and is evident in the firm cross-party commitment to ambitious targets for improvement in all aspects of education. For the most part this ambition is reflected in a desire to match itself against the best nationally and to be at the forefront of innovation. The LEA's officers and members continue to enjoy an enviable relationship with headteachers and governors. The purposeful and constructive partnership between the LEA and schools has matured and headteachers and governors are actively engaged in corporate decision making. While at higher levels well-structured annual processes integrate planning, performance management and budget processes, the quality of these processes at service level is less consistent.

12. In summary, Warwickshire is a good and improving LEA. Progress generally has been good, but the rate has not been fast enough to achieve the LEA's ambitions of being among the best in class. This all round good performance is reflected in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, published in December 2002. This gave the education service in Warwickshire two stars for current performance, and three stars (the highest category) for its capacity to improve. The LEA has well-developed management processes, is well led and has the overwhelming support of its schools. Officers and members have a good track record of responding positively to constructive criticism and many of the weaknesses identified in

this report are already being addressed. Warwickshire has demonstrated that it has the will and capacity to respond effectively to the recommendations of this report and is well placed to accelerate progress.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

13. Warwickshire is a predominantly affluent shire county bordering the West Midlands conurbation. It has a population of 509,000 and a school population of 77,000. Unemployment rates are low, compared with regional and national rates, and are falling. Warwickshire has deprivation levels below national averages. There are, however, pockets of high deprivation in all areas particularly in Nuneaton and Bedworth, where over 40 per cent of the population live in wards ranked within the lowest quartile.

14. Entitlement to free school meals is below national averages at both primary and secondary level. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need has remained broadly in line with national figures at primary level since 1999. Over the same period at secondary level the proportion of pupils with statements has risen to a little above the national averages. Minority ethnic communities comprise a small and relatively stable part of the school population² with the Indian community representing easily the largest group. There is a very small proportion of Traveller children and there are very few asylum seeker children in Warwickshire's schools. Pupil mobility is not a significant problem for Warwickshire's schools except for those in the proximity of two army bases.

15. The authority maintains 197 primary schools, of which 34 are infant and 28 are junior schools. There are 37 secondary schools; five of these are grammar schools, one is bilateral and 12 have specialist status. Warwickshire also maintains ten special schools and a pupil referral unit³. Nineteen schools have their own sixth form. Schools with Beacon status include: one nursery, one infant, two primary, two secondary and two special. Three-quarters of 16 year-old pupils either stay on at sixth form or go onto further education or vocational training; this is higher than the national average. Almost two-thirds of three and four year-olds in the county are on school rolls. Overall, some six per cent of pupils live outside the county; in the southern area this rises to 13 per cent.

Performance

16. The attainment of pupils on entry to full-time education is better than the national average and has been broadly stable over the past three years. In 2002, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 was close to national averages and in line with that of pupils in similar authorities. The rate of improvement since the last inspection is in line with both the national average and that of similar authorities.

² The proportion of the school population with a minority ethnic heritage in Warwickshire schools is 5.3 per cent at primary and 6.1 per cent at secondary compared to the national averages of 14.8 per cent at primary and 14.5 per cent at secondary.

³ The Warwickshire pupil referral unit has the title of pupil reintegration unit.

17. In 2002 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above at the end of Key Stage 2 is above national averages for mathematics and science and in line with that for English. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 is in line with that found in similar authorities for all core subjects. Rates of improvement since the last inspection are similar to the national trend and that for similar authorities.

18. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 2002 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above for English, mathematics and science is above the national averages. It is above the average for similar authorities for mathematics and science, but similar for English. Rates of improvement since the last inspection are at least in line with, and are often above, national trends and those for similar authorities.

19. In 2002 pupils' performance and rates of improvement in relation to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations were in line with the national and similar authority averages for five or more A*-C, five or more A*-G and one or more A*-G grades. Results at Advanced Level are generally above those found nationally and for similar authorities.

20. The gap between the attainment of girls and boys and the rate at which this gap is closing are both similar to that found nationally.

21. Recent Ofsted inspection findings for standards and quality of education in Warwickshire schools are broadly similar to those found nationally and for similar authorities. The pace of improvement has been faster than that found for schools nationally and in statistical neighbours. Currently one school requires special measures and eight have serious weaknesses.

22. Rates of attendance are above those found nationally and those of similar authorities for both primary and secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is well below the national average in primary schools and below the national rate in secondary schools. The rate of permanent exclusions for both primary and secondary schools is in line with national and similar authorities' averages.

Funding

23. At the time of the previous inspection the level of education funding for Warwickshire was below average. It has remained relatively low since then. For 2003/2004, in part as a result of a campaign led by the LEA and supported by Warwickshire's schools, government funding increased by £30 million.

24. The council continues to fund education above government guidelines. The budget of £236 million for 2002/2003 was eight per cent above Warwickshire's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for education and that for 2003/2004 is 6.7 per cent above SSA. Spending on under fives, the youth service and adult education is significantly above SSA in line with the council's clear priorities for early years and lifelong learning. Nevertheless, Warwickshire's local schools budget for 2002/2003 is still below that for comparator groups and about ten per cent below the national average. Primary funding is marginally closer to that for comparators than secondary. The council delegated 86 per cent of the local schools

budget to schools, in line with similar authorities and the national average and slightly above the counties' average.

25. For 2002/2003 the funding per pupil delegated to schools, the individual school budget (ISB), for both phases is below comparators and the national average, as shown in the table below.

	LEA £ per pupil	Similar authorities £ per pupil	County authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary ISB	2018	2048	2074	2223
Secondary ISB	2715	2849	2777	2940

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/2003.

26. The authority's total expenditure on centrally provided services, shown in the table below, is around six per cent below similar authorities', counties' and the national average. The LEA's expenditure on centrally provided services for school improvement is, however, significantly higher than any comparators and it is the fourth highest within county councils. Spending on strategic management and special educational needs is well below similar authorities' and the national average, although spending on strategic management is more in line with the counties' average. Spending on access is below similar authorities' and counties', but above the national average.

	LEA £ per pupil	Similar authorities £ per pupil	County authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Strategic management	87	97	89	101
School improvement	37	24	26	31
Access	147	152	163	131
Special educational needs	126	146	143	160
Total	396	419	421	423

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/2003.

27. Within special educational needs funding, central expenditure on educational psychology and statutory assessments is the lowest for any county and fourth lowest of any authority. A high proportion of the budget is retained for the pupil referral unit.

28. Capital expenditure has increased over three years from £14 million to £26.5 million. This is funded mainly through capital grants, £16.8 million, and a £1.3 million revenue contribution to capital for the repair and maintenance of schools. The authority has also successfully secured a range of additional capital funding through developer contributions, capital receipts, targeted initiatives as well as New Deal for Schools modernisation grants and formula allocations. A £16 million Private Finance Initiative project will develop information and communication technology (ICT) in schools.

29. The council secures additional education funding through its participation in a well-targeted programme of the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) initiatives. In addition to Standards Fund and schools standards funding, the council has also attracted

funding from: local public service agreements, New Opportunities Fund, Single Regeneration Budget and the 14-19 Pathfinder project.

Council structure

30. The council has 62 elected members, comprising 28 Labour, 20 Conservative, 13 Liberal Democrat and one Independent. A minority Labour administration now operates through a single-party cabinet system introduced in December 1999. The cabinet of ten portfolio holders has responsibility for all executive decisions within the overall policy and budgetary framework. Leaders of the two opposition parties also attend cabinet meetings, but do not have the right to vote on decisions. There are two cabinet members principally responsible for the work of the education department, one for schools and one for young people and families. In addition, education officers work with other cabinet members on social inclusion related work. The education liaison committee and the new schools forum provide a means for a broader set of stakeholders, including headteachers and governors, to engage in council decision making.

31. Scrutiny of education and schools' activity is undertaken by the learning overview and scrutiny committee, one of six such committees chaired by members of opposition parties. As well as monitoring and reviewing education functions, the scrutiny committee exercises its power to call in and examine cabinet decisions. There are a growing number of member-led structures that aim to provide leadership for crosscutting work, for example the children's strategic partnership board. Five area committees have been established and are beginning to provide the basis for decision making at area level and oversight of service delivery locally.

32. A team of nine chief officers supports the chief executive. Within this structure a number of corporate groups, drawn from across the council, and usually led by a chief officer, develop and co-ordinate broad themes of the council's policy. Officer groups are also involved in co-ordinating the local delivery of services under the direction and oversight of area committees.

33. The structure of the education department has changed little since the last inspection. There are two deputy county education officers, one of whom is the chief inspector, who is also responsible for the schools' team. The other is responsible for community education. The special educational needs division, Warwickshire Education Services, which is responsible for the LEA's traded services and strategy division are each led by an assistant county education officer or equivalent. The department is headed by the county education officer and supported by a departmental management team comprising heads of divisions, the director of resources and the finance and Best Value manager. A broader based management team, including heads of services, advises on operational matters.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

34. At the time of the last inspection Warwickshire's strategy for school improvement was highly satisfactory. The current school improvement strategy, included within its

strategic education plan, is highly satisfactory. It includes a well thought through, focused and coherent programme for school improvement despite some aspects of presentation being insufficiently clear and succinct. The implementation of the LEA's school improvement strategy is highly satisfactory and there is good progress towards most targets, but systems for reporting at priority and key strategy level are underdeveloped.

35. Warwickshire is now one of five LEAs working with the DfES to pilot education strategic planning as a means of rationalising statutory plans. Consequently, the requirement to submit an Education Development Plan has been waived. Warwickshire's school improvement strategy is included within the LEA's strategic plan for 2002 to 2007. In 2002, the first version of the plan was subject to extensive internal and external scrutiny and a revised plan was produced in May 2003.

36. The education strategic plan is structured around four key strategies: school improvement; educational access and inclusion; community learning; and performance management. These provide a logical and well thought through grouping for the broad range of priorities. Within the school improvement strategy section, priorities are clearly expressed and imaginatively structured. The three long-term priorities include: raising standards through school intervention and implementation of national strategies; curriculum enrichment; and secondary transformation. The choice of short-term priorities is supported by a detailed rationale that uses a series of case studies and draws upon the results of a thorough annual audit of performance and local need. The presentation of the plan does not do it justice. It is overly complex and difficult to digest, impairing the communication of the educational vision and overall strategic aims. While the rationale for short-term priorities is robust and logical, and makes the case for action in the forthcoming year, the analysis is too lengthy and often difficult to follow. Despite these apparent deficiencies, consultation on the plan has been effective and has ensured that there is a high level of understanding of the LEA's educational priorities and proposed actions among headteachers, officers and elected members.

Recommendations

<p>In order to improve the presentation of the links between the LEA's vision for education and priorities in the strategic plan:</p>
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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• define more clearly the strategic objectives; and• sharpen and simplify the analysis included within the rationale for the priorities. |
|---|

37. A well-structured set of activities and actions provides a comprehensive, if complex, programme of support for school improvement. Timescales are appropriately demanding and performance data and evidence from monitoring are used to target activity throughout the school improvement elements of the plan. While the school improvement strategy includes detailed costing and well-defined success criteria, these features are not as consistently well developed within the other three strategies. For example, the provision of full-time education for pupils not educated at school does not appear as a measurable outcome.

38. The implementation of the plan is well led in the context of very good relationships between the LEA's officers and schools. The programme of intervention and support is continuing to move schools out of categories of concern. The LEA's strategic plan uses the well-chosen 2004 school improvement targets from the council's 2001 local public service

agreement. The targets are imaginative, ambitious, and include a local flavour, for example the percentage of pupils from Nuneaton and Bedworth attaining at least Level 4 in mathematics at Key Stage 2. The LEA has met its targets at Key Stages 3 and 4, but those for Key Stage 2 are looking very challenging and, despite recent additional support in this area, they are unlikely to be realised.

39. Systems for review and evaluation of the plan are effective and monitoring roles are clearly defined. A system of regular reporting to the departmental management team, schools and the overview and scrutiny committee is well established and is informed by the results of a thorough annual review. In general, slippage is identified early and prompts remedial action. However, the focus of detailed monitoring and evaluation is at activity and service level. The reporting of progress at priority and key strategy level is insufficiently sharp and informative. This reflects the underdevelopment of systems that pull together monitoring information and co-ordinate evaluation above service level.

The allocation of resources to priorities

40. At the time of the previous inspection, the council's allocation of resources to priorities was highly satisfactory. It is now good. Priorities are clearly set out in the council's corporate strategy and business plan and the three-year financial strategy ensures that budgets for both education and social services rise in line with Government spending guidelines. The construction of three-year department budgets is informed by rigorous reviews of current spending and needs and any planned growth is aligned to strategic plans and targets. The council also allows departments to borrow against the council's reserves to fund initiatives.

41. Detailed and timely school consultation is a well-established element of the council's budget process and enables headteachers and governors to influence budget making. Schools receive indicative budgets in January. Consultation with the public is an increasingly important feature of Warwickshire's budget processes and involves, for example a cross section of voters through five area focus groups.

42. The medium-term financial strategy operates well at department level, but is not yet fully embedded at service and cost-centre level. Budget responsibilities are well understood and control of expenditure against budget is generally effective; managers are expected to bring overspends and underspends under control within a three-year time frame. This works most effectively in those services that are traded, but is not as well developed for centrally managed service budgets. The development of projects and initiatives is aligned to agreed strategic priorities and has enabled the LEA not only to attract additional funding, but also to influence national initiatives.

43. The school funding formula is clear and simple. Consultation on changes is well managed with proposals being accompanied by very clear analyses of the reasons for the proposed changes, the potential effects for individual schools and the options for implementing changes. The LEA takes decisive and effective action to deal with schools' deficit budgets. It operates a well-run licensed deficit scheme and, where necessary, the authority will remove delegation. For many years the school funding formula has provided a loan facility for schools and education services, which is used to meet short-term investment

needs.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

44. The council's approach to Best Value and securing improvement was previously good. While there has been improvement, performance in this area has risen nationally. The rate of improvement in Warwickshire has not been sufficient to maintain its previous standard and it is now highly satisfactory.

45. Since the previous inspection the council has continued to use the European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence (EFQM) model purposefully as a framework for service evaluation and to promote improvement. This has involved using an appropriate range of external assessments and reports to assess corporate and service performance. Biennial EFQM assessments have confirmed steady improvement in performance management arrangements and service performance. The authority is also proactive in seeking a range of other recognised external quality assessments such as Charter Marks and Investors in People to demonstrate improvement.

46. For the past two years, the council has streamlined its performance management framework and linked it closely to its budget-making cycle. The development of the 2002 to 2007 education strategic plan has brought together key statutory educational plans and established much clearer links to corporate strategic and business priorities. Nevertheless, the coherence and quality of management arrangements are not fully embedded at service level. Service plans do not always fully reflect the priorities in the education strategic plan and there is only a limited link to appraisal at individual level below senior managers. Not all targets and measured outcomes are yet sufficiently precise or time related. Plans are not yet consistently aligned to resources. While opportunities for teams to work together have been identified, for example between special educational needs and school improvement, integrated working is still at a relatively early stage. Many of these weaknesses have already been highlighted in the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment report, published in December 2002.

47. The external auditor has approved the Best Value Performance Plan 2002/2003. It is an improvement on previous plans and focuses resources effectively on those strategic reviews that are most likely to improve management performance. Strategic Best Value reviews include those of traded services and school improvement and the soon to commence Best Value review of statements and assessment. Other Best Value reviews aim to address specific problems in individual services, for example the admissions team is ascertaining the changes needed to the admissions service following changes to the national Admissions Code of Practice. The council's Best Value reviews are challenging and rigorous and involve appropriate consultation and meaningful comparisons of Warwickshire's performance against best in class. Clear and succinct reports are made to overview and scrutiny committees and recent procedural changes have sought to secure ownership by relevant portfolio holders. However, improvement plans arising from Best Value reviews sometimes lack detail. Additionally, while some services have been outsourced, the council prefers reviews that will lead to Warwickshire being the provider of choice for services or brokering services where this is most cost effective.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

48. At the time of the last inspection support for school improvement was highly satisfactory. It continues to be so. Previously the LEA's clear strategy was being implemented by well-organised school improvement services. Support was well targeted and effective, particularly for schools causing concern. These continue to be strengths of the LEA's support. The LEA has worked hard to address weaknesses in curriculum support for information and communication technology and this area is now satisfactory. Support for schools in accessing and using performance data has improved. Support for literacy and numeracy has improved from an already satisfactory base. The Key Stage 3 strategy has been well implemented. The LEA has successfully maintained enviably high quality relationships with its schools, characterised by unusually high levels of trust. However, support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory.

49. Despite the increased effectiveness of many elements of the LEA's support for school improvement, key aspects of its approach to monitoring and supporting and challenging schools have not kept up with changing national expectations and best practice elsewhere. The increasing access to and use of information and data has provided the LEA with opportunities to improve the targeting and precision of challenge and intervention. The LEA has realised this potential in the way it has developed its support for the national strategies and for schools causing concern. However, the authority does not make sufficient use of this data and information to reduce the level of visiting by link inspectors to the LEA's effective schools. The high level of support provided as an entitlement to effective schools is inconsistent with their high and improving capacity for self-evaluation. Despite link inspectors being provided with well-developed analyses of performance data to support target setting within schools, not all schools are setting challenging targets for pupils' attainment.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

50. The effectiveness of services to support school improvement is highly satisfactory and they provide satisfactory value for money. Leadership of services was good at the time of the last inspection. No fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection, but the evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation and from the school survey indicates that this has been maintained.

51. A large schools' team delivers support for school improvement. Link inspectors and national strategy team staff lead on most school improvement activities and specialist inspectors and area education officers support them. The deployment of link inspectors is reviewed regularly to ensure their phase specialisms and experience is aligned to the needs of schools. Currently staff are well matched to their specialist roles and while some staff are overburdened, improvements to the monitoring of workload are planned. The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement is good. Many of the team also contribute to the development of national projects, and the authority makes effective use of the specialist knowledge and experience thereby gained by staff. Appropriate use is made of secondment

and consultants to supplement the work of the service, occasionally to fill gaps in specialist knowledge and expertise, but also to provide a critical and objective viewpoint for the review of services. Staff are provided with briefings and updates flexibly to inform and modify practice in order to meet changing needs.

52. Strategic planning of services and the performance management of services were both good at the time of the last inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation indicates that the quality of support has remained good and no fieldwork was carried out. The current inspection did not reveal any evidence to invalidate this judgement.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

53. At the time of the previous inspection, the way the LEA defined monitoring, challenge and intervention and the extent to which it shared these understandings with schools was good. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has redefined its policy for focused support and intervention and shared this with schools. No fieldwork was carried out, but the LEA's self-evaluation and the school survey support the view that the LEA's performance in this area remains good.

The focusing of the LEA's support on areas of greatest need

54. At the time of the last inspection this function was highly satisfactory. It is currently satisfactory. Since the previous inspection the LEA has further strengthened procedures in identifying schools' needs and has put in place a new policy for categorising and allocating schools to a level of entitlement of support. The authority also provides termly visits to every school by link inspectors. These visits include approximately one to two days for activities, individually negotiated with schools to support them in addressing their own development needs. Taken together the LEA's policy and current practice allow relatively high levels of centrally funded support to be provided to all schools. For effective schools it is too high. The limited opportunities available to senior staff in these schools to purchase the support they require is inconsistent with their capacity for self-management.

55. Systems for identifying schools causing concern and targeting support have improved. Inspectors use an extensive and well-developed set of criteria, and a robust and accurate analysis of a wide range of data and information, to make incisive assessments of the needs of schools. Support to schools with intensive needs is generous, but very well focussed. This is effective and since the last inspection the need for intervention and intensive support has reduced. Staff from the national strategies also make effective use of the data to target precisely schools requiring additional assistance. This is well co-ordinated to form part of a coherent package of support to schools.

56. Few elements of the LEA's services to support school improvement are currently delegated to schools. The exception is the local authority learning and behaviour support service that is a traded service with high levels of buy-back. Schools can purchase further training and curriculum support from the Warwickshire education development service, but with such a high level of entitlement to support from link inspectors and national strategy

teams, demand is low. While schools are very satisfied with the quality, the high levels of centrally funded monitoring and support currently provided do not reflect the spirit and principles of the *Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations* and are inconsistent with schools being able to exercise their right of choice. The LEA has belatedly recognised the need to delegate some of the funding for school improvement and is currently reorganising services to address these deficiencies.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

57. This function was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection and remains so. Self-evaluation processes are well developed and support to schools to enable them to improve this critical aspect of their work is wide ranging and effective. Improvements in access to, and use of, performance data has provided greater support to the target-setting processes. The authority uses data well to identify schools' strengths and weaknesses, although this has not always led to all schools setting challenging targets. The LEA has been slow to exploit the opportunities provided through access to improved performance data to target link inspector visiting and to monitor effective schools.

58. The LEA strongly supports schools' self-evaluation and has built upon its own extensive experience of using the EFQM model to guide continuous improvement. All schools have been provided with high quality training, advice and guidance in the use of self-evaluation using the Ofsted model. Access to and use of performance data for both schools and the LEA's services has substantially improved since the last inspection. Gaps in the performance data in relation to tracking the progress and achievement of minority ethnic pupils and the foundation subjects at Key Stage 3 are being addressed. The capacity of schools' staff to use performance data has been enhanced by the introduction of accessible and practical guides. Comparative analyses using well-chosen families of schools have been developed. These processes have enabled link inspectors and staff in schools to gain an accurate and robust understanding of each school's strengths and weaknesses, particularly in schools causing concern. The number of schools requiring enhanced levels of support and monitoring is reducing.

59. The LEA is at a relatively early stage of exploiting the potential of improved performance data to focus more precisely the deployment of link inspectors. A substantial part of their current work involves visits to schools to obtain additional information and monitor progress. The potential of further sophisticated analysis of performance data to reduce the need for school visiting is being explored as part of the LEA's wider plans to reorganise the school improvement service.

60. A well-established system of providing notes of visits to schools is operated. Such notes provide headteachers and governors with succinct analyses of schools' strengths and weaknesses and decisions on schools' support needs. However, the quality of the notes, while generally satisfactory, varies. The LEA has implemented a programme of training with link inspectors to ensure that reporting is less descriptive and more tightly focused on identifying the key issues and actions required.

61. The LEA has continued to provide timely guidance and support to schools in setting targets. Appropriate use is made of value added data, for example to provide schools with an

expected range within which to set challenging targets. Evidence from schools and inspectors' notes of visits confirm that the discussions in relation to attainment targets are generally challenging. They are integrated into the process of schools' self-evaluation and focus appropriately on progress made by individual pupils in relation to their prior attainment. Challenge leads to clear, well-defined programmes of action and support, particularly in relation to the work of the literacy and numeracy teams. However, the extent to which the targets for primary schools are consistently challenging remains questionable, and some schools have set low and unambitious targets. Schools' aggregated target for Level 4 mathematics for 2003 is little different to that for 2002 while the corresponding 2003 target for English has fallen slightly compared to that for 2002. For both subjects, schools aggregate targets are in line with the DfES target for 2003, but there is a considerable gap for 2004.

Recommendations

In order to secure greater effectiveness in monitoring and challenging schools:

- identify the reasons where the LEA's and schools' targets differ; and
- ensure link inspectors' support for setting targets focuses on schools setting robust, challenging, but realistic, targets.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

62. The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools was good at the time of the previous inspection. The schools' team secures necessary additional support for schools causing concern from the LEA's other services, for example it has a service level agreement with the learning and behaviour support service. Careful thought has been given to the methods of sharing information about schools in order to provide early warning of those at risk of failing. While these processes are time consuming for those involved they ensure school improvement professionals have up-to-date, consistent and accurate knowledge of schools and their needs. No fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection. Evidence from the LEA's own evaluation data showing a reduction in the number of underperforming schools, and from Ofsted's monitoring of schools causing concern, indicates that effectiveness has been maintained.

Support for literacy

63. At the time of the previous inspection support for literacy was highly satisfactory and it remains so. The strategy is soundly embedded in schools, co-ordinators are well supported with good quality training, and support is appropriately deployed to schools with identified needs. Standards at Key Stage 1 are above average and are rising in line with the national trend. Performance at Key Stage 2 has declined over the last three years, although it remains slightly ahead of national levels. A thorough investigation by the LEA into this decline failed to identify clear underlying reasons, but the analysis of detailed information gathered enabled the team to refocus school support and intervention. In a small but

significant number of schools, difficulties in recruitment and retention are frustrating attempts to accelerate improvement in performance. The authority fell short of meeting the 2002 agreed targets by ten per cent and currently anticipates that the challenging 2004 target is unlikely to be achieved.

64. Improved value-added data have led to earlier and more confident identification of schools in categories of concern. A new system for categorising schools that are underperforming, and identifying those with specific support needs, was developed jointly with the numeracy team and has recently been introduced. As a result of this, the work of the literacy team is more closely focused on priorities and schools know what level of support to expect. There have been significant increases in attainment in some targeted schools. Progress has been made on raising the attainment of boys and increasing the numbers of pupils attaining higher level qualifications.

65. The literacy and Key Stage 3 strategies are well co-ordinated in relation to supporting pupils' transition from primary to secondary school and literacy across the curriculum. There are good working links with the numeracy team. Co-ordination and joint working with other services across the authority are satisfactory. Work with the library service and the provision of training for early years staff and those returning to teaching exemplify this.

66. As they have gained experience the literacy team and schools have become more confident in adapting the strategy to fit local needs. The development of the strategy has built upon the successful leading literacy teachers scheme, which has been extended by using key headteachers to provide guidance and support to colleagues. This is a model of good management of the strategy at school level. However, many of these innovations are recent and have yet to show an effect on performance. Early evaluations of the oracy project are promising and indicate improved confidence and motivation of pupils in schools with high levels of deprivation. Overall developments in support indicate a good capacity to improve further.

Support for numeracy

67. Support for numeracy was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. There was sound support for the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy and primary schools were well advanced in their preparation for implementation. The implementation of the LEA's numeracy strategy has been well managed and the LEA's support is now good. The numeracy team has high credibility in schools; the strategy and the local priorities within it are clearly understood by schools and additional support is provided in a finely focused way to meet needs.

68. Attainment in mathematics is improving and results in both Key Stages 1 and 2 are slightly ahead of national standards. The LEA's target for 2002 was narrowly missed, but the rate of improvement indicates that the 2004 target, while challenging, remains realistic.

69. The quality and focus of training are good. Training is clearly centred on raising attainment and embedding critical elements of the strategy. Regular meetings for all school co-ordinators provide an appropriate balance between new developments and disseminating

effective practice. Teachers find them useful, stimulating and clearly directed at improving classroom practice. Instability in staffing is frustrating the team's attempts to raise standards in a small but significant number of primary schools. The numeracy team has responded well to this problem. Primary school supply teachers are well supported with a training pack to assist them in implementing the strategy, including material to help in short-term lesson planning. New numeracy co-ordinators receive a five-day intensive training course and effective individual professional support. This support is highly valued by schools and it is relieving some of the tensions due to staffing instability; pressing short-term needs are being addressed.

70. Effective links have been made with the Key Stage 3 strategy and the literacy team. There is good co-ordinated work to raise standards in both subjects. This work is given added challenge and focus by the need to meet additional local public service agreement targets in 2004. The progress and developments so far in support for numeracy indicate a good capacity to improve further.

Support for information and communication technology

71. Support for information and communication technology was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It has improved and is now satisfactory. The LEA's strategy for ICT is sound. It is based on an extensive audit of schools' technical needs, although some targets for attainment across Key Stage 1 to post 16 are not supported by adequate analyses of past performance.

72. Improvements have been brought about by the LEA adopting a co-ordinated approach to the purchase of computers, software and infrastructure. This has made the delivery of technical support easier and has reduced uncertainties in the funding for schools' ICT. Schools have a high regard for the quality and professionalism of the ICT team. Schools have been very well advised on their use of National Grid for Learning funding and the national targets for the ratio of computers to pupils for 2002 have been met. The LEA is on course to meet national targets for broadband access. Additional funding from the local public service agreement is being used to underpin further developments at school and community level.

73. The LEA's support for New Opportunities Fund ICT training has been excellent. The LEA became an accredited provider of training and the rate of completion of training across Warwickshire's schools is among the highest in the country. A satisfactory programme of training, regular meetings with school co-ordinators along with visits to schools to identify effective classroom practice are helping to raise expectations. Good links to national organisations ensure that the ICT team and schools are well informed about the latest developments.

74. Appropriate advice and guidance on target setting and assessment of work have been provided to secondary schools. In contrast, primary schools are not fully confident in assessing standards. The LEA is less well informed about the standards of attainment in schools than other LEAs because of gaps in data collection and analysis. This affects its ability to challenge rigorously. There are currently no systems to collect data and measure progress in relation to key targets defined by the LEA for 2004. The LEA is aware of this

gap and will partly address it through a survey of standards and quality of teaching in all schools in summer 2003. All of these developments indicate a good capacity to improve this function further.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for information and communication technology:

- in agreement with schools and colleges, develop systems to collect and analyse data regularly to identify progress in relation to the LEA's targets for Key Stages 1 and 2 and Key Skills Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications; and
- provide guidance to enable primary schools to confidently assign pupils' work to National Curriculum levels.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

75. This aspect of the LEA's support was not included in the previous inspection. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is good. The LEA has adopted the national Key Stage 3 strategy and it forms an integral part of school improvement work in secondary schools.

76. A full team of consultants is in place and the strategy is being implemented effectively. The consultants are well managed and clear and effective systems are in place to monitor the quality and impact of their work in schools. Additional support is appropriately targeted and based on the outcomes of the schools' self-evaluation audits. Support agreements clearly identify the areas for improvement, the strategies to be used, and the actions that need to be taken by the school and the adviser. These agreements are a model of clarity and precision and embody good practice.

77. All schools are provided with high quality training that is very well attended. Teachers value the training and materials and are increasingly confident. Strong, collaborative links have been established with the literacy and numeracy strategies in primary schools. They have also been established with the learning and behaviour support service to support training for the recent behaviour initiative in the Key Stage 3 strategy.

78. The LEA's monitoring has identified very promising signs of improvement, particularly in schools in receipt of high levels of support, and Key Stage 3 test results are improving. The strategy team's support has been particularly effective in schools with serious weakness or in challenging circumstances. In some of these schools the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above has risen by eight to ten per cent within a year. The performance of progress units, established to support the transition of pupils from primary to secondary school, is variable. It is too early to link the effects of the strategy closely with the already high attendance and satisfactory exclusion rates, but there is evidence of improvements in pupils' attitudes and motivation. All of these developments show a very good capacity for improvement.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

79. The support for minority ethnic and Traveller children was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. No fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection, but the evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation and from the school survey indicates that the quality of provision remains highly satisfactory.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

80. No judgement was made on this activity at the time of the last inspection. Support provided by Warwickshire for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory.

81. The LEA has not been able to maintain the leadership to drive improvement in this area during a period of staffing difficulty. There is no evidence of a coherent strategic approach that is making a difference in terms of outcomes for pupils. Work with gifted and talented children continues to be a priority for the school improvement strategy within the LEA strategic plan as it has been for the last three years. Progress towards ambitious targets has been slow and evidence from national tests shows an inconsistent profile with performance generally being above the national average, but not consistently better than comparable authorities.

82. Although there are some examples of good practice in the support given to schools, this is not systematically targeted. The school survey indicates a good level of satisfaction with the LEA's support, with networks of co-ordinators and the advisory visits being particularly valued. There is also evidence that the summer schools initiatives, that have been sustained over three years, are now recruiting well and have developed in imagination and originality. At a strategic level the lack of coherence stems from a lack of clarity concerning the definition of gifted and talented pupils and from inconsistent messages about support structures. This prevents the development of a shared vision and a common pattern of identification. There is no clear guidance or strategy to help schools focus on the needs and development of pupils talented in areas other than academic. There is little evidence that the good work done by schools in support of gifted and talented pupils is integrated into other aspects of their education.

Recommendations

In order to improve its support for the education of gifted and talented pupils the LEA should develop, in partnership with schools,:

- a clear definition of gifted and talented;
 - clear expectations for meeting the needs of pupils talented in non-academic areas;
 - guidance on the role of co-ordinators and named governors; and
 - a wider range of outcome measures.
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Support for school management

83. At the time of the last inspection support for school leadership and management was highly satisfactory and it is now satisfactory. Since the last inspection support for leadership and management has continued to be a high priority and the quality of leadership and management has improved across all schools. For the increasing number of effective schools this support is not well differentiated. Warwickshire has not moved as quickly as other LEAs in securing opportunities for schools' leaders and managers to operate autonomously.

84. The evidence from the analysis of the LEA's monitoring information and statistical data indicates that the overall quality of leadership and management in Warwickshire's schools is improving at a faster rate than in similar authorities. The proportion of both primary and secondary schools where management and efficiency are good or very good in recent Ofsted school inspections is a little above that found nationally and in similar authorities. The LEA has responded well to increasing national expectations that headteachers and managers improve the quality and extent of monitoring of work and standards in schools by strongly promoting training for the National Professional Qualification for Headship. In addition, a pilot project to develop the capacity of leadership teams has been well received and had a good take-up.

85. Additional support for schools with specific leadership and management weaknesses, and for schools causing concern, is well targeted to individual circumstances and need. The LEA makes appropriate and effective use of secondments of experienced senior managers from other Warwickshire schools. Nevertheless, support for school leadership and management continues to be provided by link inspectors in schools without specific weaknesses. This practice has not changed sufficiently to meet increasing national expectations for school self-management. They conduct termly visits to all schools, irrespective of the quality of leadership and management. In 2001, the LEA, in response to critical evaluation from schools, has sought to negotiate with headteachers on how to tailor the two-day visits to better meet the needs of each school. While this provides schools with greater flexibility in the way they use the support, the LEA has yet to properly address the issue of how to adapt its systems and practice to cope with better performing schools.

86. All new headteachers, and acting heads are well supported with a comprehensive induction programme, a 'buddy' headteacher who acts as a mentor, and continuing professional development opportunities through conferences and area network meetings. The current support for middle managers is satisfactory and comes largely through subject meetings with specialist inspectors. However, arrangements to ensure consistency in the quality and range of support are not yet secure and the LEA has rightly identified this as an area for development. Work with the National College of School Leadership has already begun to secure this and an LEA-led programme to identify excellent middle managers to support schools in challenging circumstances is underway. Schools are generally satisfied with the support they receive and rate it as satisfactory.

87. Since the last inspection the LEA has consistently supported self-evaluation and schools are aware of a range of models. A new school self-evaluation framework is to be shared with schools shortly. Schools' staff make good use of performance data provided through the LEA's new website. Financial analysis and information are provided and local

financial benchmarking information is made available to schools on request. Additional helpful support for financial management is provided, when necessary, to headteachers and governors of schools in difficulties.

88. Relatively little procurement and brokering of services takes place from agencies or consultants beyond the authority and little information on alternative providers is provided. The education development service keeps a limited list of external trainers and consultants and a thorough system of monitoring quality and providing feedback and training has been established. The LEA's current review of traded services recognises further work is needed and plans are developed to address procurement and brokering consistently across services. All of these plans and developments indicate a good capacity to further improve this function.

Support for governors

89. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's support to governors was good. The LEA's self-evaluation and response to the school survey indicates that the quality of support has been maintained and continues to be good.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

90. The strategy for services to support school management was not inspected previously. It is highly satisfactory. The majority of traded services are provided by Warwickshire Education Services, but other council departments provide a range of other services. Warwickshire Education Services is highly regarded by schools, has a clear and effective approach to the delivery of services and has earned three charter marks for its strategy for service delivery, development and improvement. The coherence and consistency of all services that trade with schools are being strengthened in accordance with the recommendations of a comprehensive Best Value review. This work is overseen by a traded services board composed of service heads with an independent chair. Schools are able to represent their views to the board.

91. Warwickshire Education Services has developed clear and flexible service level agreements with schools which meet the needs identified by schools in annual customer surveys and regular service user-group meetings. Complaints about Warwickshire Education Services are dealt with promptly and effectively. There are high levels of buy-back by schools, but managers have a commercial outlook and recognise the need to continue to earn this buy-back, especially when schools' budgets are under pressure. Some other services, for example the learning and behaviour support service, have adopted management practices similar to those in Warwickshire Education Services, but elsewhere there is inconsistent practice in costing, pricing and service monitoring. Complaints are not always resolved promptly, for example in relation to the time taken to resolve technical support problems for schools' IT administration systems. These inconsistencies will be addressed by the traded services board.

92. The traded services Best Value review rightly recognised schools' increasing maturity in evaluating and purchasing services which meet their requirements. Although

strongly loyal to the council, headteachers and governors are increasingly critical customers. The council's policy is that traded services are provided on a true-cost basis and most traded services already make conscious use of benchmarking data available for their services. While the traded services Best Value review improvement plan focuses on raising the quality of services to ensure that they remain the first choice for schools, there is also a clear recognition that appropriate brokerage arrangements need to be developed.

93. Schools' **financial and human resources services** were not inspected. Previously they were very good and good respectively. The authority's self-evaluation and the school survey indicated that this continues to be the position so no fieldwork was undertaken.

94. **Property services** were not previously inspected. They are satisfactory. A link surveyor provided by the property services division visits the schools annually, reports on suggested priorities for action, and ensures that schools' priorities are linked to those identified through asset management planning.

95. The increasing demand from schools arising from the additional capital funding available has led to increased pressures on the link surveyor's time and while advice is currently free to schools the LEA recognises that this cannot be sustained longer term. Schools are also able to purchase risk management, option appraisal and capital project support from Warwickshire Education Services. The draft and overdue handbook for schools on managing premises, due to be consulted on shortly, is comprehensive and much needed as schools have had increased responsibilities and funding for a number of years.

96. Increasingly the council's provision is moving from providing services to commissioning external providers. Partnering arrangements on contracts are increasingly used as more flexible and less adversarial alternatives to competitive tendering. Emergencies are effectively handled and the council's emergency repair indemnity scheme has 99 per cent buy-back from schools.

97. **Services for information and communication technology in school administration** were satisfactory previously. They are now highly satisfactory. There has been sound progress in key areas since the previous report and further improvement has followed a review of ICT support and the Best Value review of information management. The most important is the establishment of education data warehouse facilities that have greatly increased the ability of the LEA to meet schools' data and information needs and also provide a secure foundation for further ICT development. Schools have Internet access and email communications, although belated, are now securely in place. There are secure mechanisms for data transfer between schools and the LEA operates to a published annual timetable.

98. The majority of schools use common hardware and software, but, where possible, support is provided for alternative arrangements. Schools have access to highly regarded training and support from Warwickshire Education Services that is regularly reviewed in line with developing needs. The LEA operates the Pupil Level Annual School Census successfully. Schools' administration and curriculum ICT systems are linked.

99. Some weaknesses remain. There has been a positive but slow response to schools' complaints about the quality of technical support for ICT administrative systems. For some schools the cost of the premium technician support service is regarded as too high and the

speed in resolving difficulties is still a concern. In the school survey, the technical support for ICT in schools' administration was strongly criticised, but schools appreciate the recent efforts to resolve problems.

100. **Cleaning and caretaking, grounds maintenance and catering** were not previously inspected. Catering is highly satisfactory. Cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance are satisfactory.

101. While the LEA does offer service level agreements and individual contracts are available there is, rightly, a recognition that practice is inconsistent across council services to schools. There is only a limited take up of cleaning, which has merged with caretaking, as the majority of schools have chosen to provide this service themselves. Grounds maintenance is currently provided on interim arrangements pending a review resulting from the outcome of an equal pay claim. Headteachers rated the service as a little better than satisfactory in the school survey.

102. There is a high take-up of the catering service by primary schools. Secondary schools generally buy support from the LEA for operating their canteens. Costs are clearly benchmarked to ensure competitiveness. Nutritional standards are met and menus are colour coded to highlight healthy eating options. Some secondary schools are supported in operating cashless tills that are very popular with pupils and staff. Good efforts are made to inform parents not only of the options for school catering, but also of the importance of healthy eating during the school day. Helpful support is also provided to breakfast clubs. While pupils have few opportunities to influence the choice of food presented this is recognised as an area for improvement.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

103. The LEA's support for assuring the supply and quality of teachers is satisfactory. This was not previously inspected. Across the county recruitment and retention rates are similar to the national average. In some areas, particularly towards the north and east of the county, recruitment and retention difficulties are more pressing. Vacancies follow the national pattern of subject shortages and are frustrating attempts to improve standards and progress in mathematics and English in a small but significant number of schools.

104. A three-year recruitment plan is being developed and the authority has funded the appointment of a recruitment strategy manager. A broad range of strategies has been explored, for example training for returners, recruitment from industry and abroad, and a pilot to explore the feasibility of providing a supply agency service to Warwickshire's schools. These strategies have yet to be fully implemented and currently few teachers are engaged through these routes. Individual schools with particular recruitment difficulties are provided with good quality tailored support to assist them in promoting their school and in managing the recruitment process.

105. Good recruitment packs and promotions at training institutions have been very effective in recruiting a high number of newly qualified teachers for the current academic year. An effective on-line application system has been established and a small, but significant and growing number of teachers are being supported through the housing for

teachers' scheme. Newly qualified teachers are very well supported with induction events and conferences and this is reflected in the high percentage choosing to stay in the authority into their second year.

106. Data on the recruitment, retention and supply of teachers are not well used to analyse patterns and identify emerging needs. This, in turn, affects the authority's ability to respond to emerging problems in a planned and timely way.

Recommendation

In order to develop a coherent strategy to meet predicted recruitment and retention needs:

- establish robust systems to analyse the workforce data to better inform strategic planning for medium- and long-term recruitment and retention needs.

107. Continuing professional development is provided through Warwickshire Education Services. A broad range of quality training courses for teachers, support staff and specialist teaching assistants is available as a traded service to schools. Many courses are provided by staff from the authority's own schools' team of advisers and inspectors, in response to the general needs of schools, and few external providers or consultants are engaged. A list of consultants, for example those previously used as speakers on conferences or training events, is kept and an effective system of assuring quality is maintained. National training programmes are well promoted and there is good take-up by senior managers. Early work with the National College of School Leadership to provide courses for subject leaders is well underway. The LEA has very good capacity to improve this function.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

108. The LEA's support for special educational needs has improved and is highly satisfactory overall. At the time of the last inspection it was a significant area of weakness due to an under-developed strategy, poor performance in meeting statutory targets and deadlines, unsatisfactory systems for budget management and inadequate feedback to schools following annual reviews. The 1999 inspection made five recommendations to help the LEA improve in this area. The LEA has made good progress in addressing all of these and there is evidence of good support being provided in respect of the LEA's strategy and in meeting its statutory obligations. A major factor in achieving the substantial and significant improvement has been intelligent, positive and highly regarded leadership. Good quality credible officers have developed the supportive ethos that has facilitated change. The school survey shows very strong approval for the LEA's support.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

109. The LEA has a good special educational needs strategy. There is a clear commitment to inclusion. This commitment is reflected in corporate policies and plans, the LEA's strategic plan and in practice. Elected members are strongly committed to addressing the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and have supported this with appropriate resources. Support for the development of inclusion includes the provision of expertise, advice and professional development to colleagues in mainstream schools.

110. The LEA has a clear vision for the future of its special schools, describing them as outward-looking centres of excellence working with their mainstream partners and other special schools. Progress towards this aim has been systematic and at a realistic pace. Schools and parents have been fully consulted and elected members appropriately engaged. Substantial capital has been allocated to improve special schools' buildings. Schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties have merged or are planned to merge to cater for a clearly identified group of pupils with severe and complex needs. Although the strategy and resourcing of dual placements for pupils and outreach support to mainstream schools has yet to be developed, the LEA has begun to address these deficiencies.

111. The LEA has reallocated resources to support special educational needs in order to reduce schools' dependency upon statements as a means of attracting additional resources, to stabilise growth in expenditure on special educational needs and to ensure early intervention. This policy has been developed through consultation with schools and the implications of new policies have been explored. There are inevitably some reservations, but schools are generally confident that the LEA will respond to their concerns and will continue to develop the policy in partnership with them.

112. Special educational needs features strongly in the LEA's strategic plan. The plan includes well-constructed priorities and activities that have been informed by an accurate

audit of the pattern and distribution of needs. For example, the LEA has responded to the growth in the number of pupils identified as being autistic by making this the first priority for detailed planning. However, while most of the plans have specified outcomes and timescales, the alignment of resources to activities is not always clear.

Statutory obligations

113. Statutory obligations are securely met and this is monitored. The LEA's work in this area is highly satisfactory and shows significant and sustained improvement since the previous inspection. The timely completion of statements was a concern when the LEA was inspected in 1999. There has been considerable improvement in this area. In 2001/2002, the LEA completed 59 per cent of all statements within 18 weeks, which is in line with the average performance nationally and for similar authorities. The unaudited figures for 2002/2003 show significant further improvement. The LEA worked effectively with the health service to address concerns about the completion of medical advice and provides regular feedback to the primary care trusts on their performance. There are very good protocols for joint funding with both health and social services. The LEA has also worked directly with the health service to secure improving levels of therapeutic support. The LEA's detailed special educational needs and inclusion handbook provides schools with an up-to-date and secure reference point for both processes and practice and reflects the expectations of the new national Code of Practice on special educational needs.

114. The LEA's well-respected parent partnership scheme is highly valued by headteachers although it is overstretched and a comparative financial analysis indicates that significantly fewer resources are committed to this area than in similar authorities. The LEA exercises well its responsibility to parents in terms of informing them of their rights and engaging them in determining their children's future. Parental requests for assessment are dealt with appropriately. Standard letters inform parents of their rights in respect of tribunals and a conscious effort is made to handle contentious cases sensitively and without conflict.

115. The LEA's statements of special educational need do not specify the provision made for pupils in detail. This is a conscious decision by the LEA to provide flexibility for schools. However, the lack of detail makes it difficult for parents to understand what provision they may expect for their child and also makes it difficult for the LEA to monitor provision.

School improvement

116. The LEA's support for school improvement was unsatisfactory previously. There has been improvement and it is now highly satisfactory. The standard of support services for special educational needs is one of the LEA's strengths. After the last inspection, support services were reorganised and refocused and now they have a very clear view of their roles and responsibilities. These are set out in the special educational needs and inclusion reference file. The services are targeted to areas of greatest need. Although some concerns about the educational psychology service were reflected in the school survey, discussion with schools contacted during the inspection suggested these were more about availability of a

limited resource rather than the quality of support provided. The LEA's disability, illness, sensory and communication service integrates pre-school support well and pupils with complex and severe needs are identified and targeted. The budget for learning and behavioural support services has been delegated and schools pay the full cost when they buy support. Schools welcomed this change because of the flexibility and choice this gives them. Special educational needs support services are fully staffed.

117. The LEA has a strong network of special educational needs co-ordinators supported by regular meetings. Training for the new special educational needs Code of Practice was thorough and well evaluated. The extensive, useful special educational needs and inclusion reference file provides up-to-date guidance. Schools are involved in area moderating groups, which ensure consistent decision making and the transparent allocation of additional resources.

118. The use of target setting to support the achievement of pupils with special educational needs is weak with inconsistent standards of individual education plans being a significant factor. While recent training and the special educational needs and inclusion reference file have provided a good model for individual education plans, evidence from a review of a sample of pupils' special educational needs files and discussion with teachers during the inspection suggests considerable flexibility is permitted. The quality of plans is variable and some individual education plans lack sufficient precision. The lack of systematic monitoring of quality diminishes the LEA's capacity to review provision.

119. There is now a well structured and monitored annual review process and reviews are carried out in a timely way. Clear feedback is given to schools after annual reviews within a specified timescale and this reinforces the good practice in schools.

Value for money

120. The LEA provides satisfactory value for money in respect of the way it exercises its special educational needs functions. There are good performance management frameworks and clear accountabilities for the services. Good information is provided for schools on their roles and responsibilities and the support they might expect from the LEA.

121. The performance management framework for special educational needs services ensures activity is focused on service priorities. The LEA provides, through its special educational needs and inclusion reference file, clear guidance on the relative responsibilities of schools and the LEA. The reference file indicates the level of support available and how it can be accessed. All of the special educational needs support services have secured Investors in People status.

122. There has been substantial annual growth in the LEA's expenditure for special educational needs for several years. Efficient monitoring has succeeded in anticipating, but not preventing, regular overspending against special educational needs budgets. A new pattern of resource allocation has been developed to stabilise spending in this area. The movement of resources away from statements into delegation based on pupils' prior attainment is designed to allocate resources for pupils with more common special educational needs directly to schools. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

Systems for monitoring schools' expenditure are not sufficiently consistent or regular. When resources are delegated through statements the amount is clearly and transparently specified. Funding for pupils with high needs and for pupils with statements is reviewed as part of the annual review and subject to rigorous moderation by a panel of officers. However, the LEA does not have in place systems to measure the effectiveness of the use of resources by schools to meet the special educational needs of children who do not require the protection of a statement. While there is monitoring of the use by schools of delegated resources this does not yet include the monitoring of outcomes.

Recommendation

In order to ensure that pupils with special educational needs, who do not have the protection of statements, have effective provision the LEA should:

- in partnership with schools monitor the provision made by schools for those pupils, evaluate its effectiveness and the outcomes achieved.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

The strategy to promote social inclusion

123. No judgement was made on this activity at the time of the last inspection. Support provided by Warwickshire for social inclusion is very good. The education directorate leads on much of the support for social inclusion and an education theme is prominent in many aspects of the council's work in promoting social inclusion. The county council has a social inclusion strategy that has been reviewed systematically and the education directorate has a strategy for vulnerable children. Both of these strategies aim to establish a pattern of support focused on the most disadvantaged. The recent joint protocol with the police and the joint working with social services in respect of looked after children are two examples of effective multidisciplinary working. The education service took the lead on developing a cross-cutting county council 'invest to save' bid which will reduce the reliance on expensive, specialist out-of-county placements to meet the needs of some vulnerable children.

124. The attainment and attendance of vulnerable groups such as looked after children; pupils from ethnic minorities; and pregnant schoolgirls are monitored. Support for pupils with needs such as hearing loss or visual impairment is targeted and progress evaluated. There is an overall strategy to reduce permanent exclusions and increase attendance and intervention is targeted on the areas of highest need. Eight of the seventeen 2004 local public service agreement targets focus on inclusion, encompassing participation rates in adult education, reintegration from the pupil referral unit and attainment of looked after children. There has been improvement on all of these since 2001 and all but two are currently projected to be achieved.

125. There are many good examples of multi-agency working supported, where necessary, by formal protocols and service level agreements. A good multi-agency protocol regulates the sharing of confidential information. A multi-agency teenage pregnancy strategy group is addressing the issue of support for the child to secure education for the mother. For these and other potentially isolated pupils there is an interesting pilot in the use of on-line learning.

126. A multi-agency children and young people officers group has been established to ensure that the co-ordination of all services is strengthened. Education officers have taken the lead in seeking to ensure that Children's Fund resources are allocated strategically. The 'positive about young people' initiative includes activities that aim to reduce crime and increase attendance for groups of young people at particular risk of social exclusion.

The supply of school places

127. This was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation indicates that it continues to be so and this is supported by the outcomes of the school survey. No fieldwork was undertaken.

Asset management

128. Asset management planning was not inspected previously. It is highly satisfactory. In Autumn 2002 the DfES assessed the information gathered by the LEA about the condition of schools' buildings as satisfactory. Information on the condition of schools' buildings is kept up to date. Deficiencies in information on the suitability of school buildings, stemming from inconsistencies in the original survey, have been addressed by a new survey and consultant headteachers have worked with schools to moderate outcomes. Information on school places and capacity has been collated and is being confirmed with the DfES.

129. The officer responsible for supporting asset management planning is overstretched, but, nevertheless, works very effectively with the council's property services and the premises section of Warwickshire Education Services to put in place sound strategies for asset management. Officers and members recognise that the LEA has underinvested in its capacity to support asset management planning. Schools have been able to purchase support from Warwickshire Education Services for their capital projects and recent additional training and guidance will improve the management capacity of schools' staff.

130. The local policy statement has been revised in consultation with schools and diocesan authorities and clarifies responsibilities and funding arrangements. It is also specific about schools' use of devolved capital and their contribution to agreed programmes. The priorities for major education capital programmes are specifically linked to agreed priorities in the education strategic plan. However, the benefits to schools' and pupils' performance from proposed capital investment are not well defined.

131. The council has twice applied unsuccessfully for Private Finance Initiative credits. Feedback from the DfES indicates that this is because it is a relatively advantaged authority and priority has been to support more disadvantaged areas. The LEA was still able to progress with its special schools reorganisation programme. It is now redeveloping its proposals for a major investment in modernising secondary schools as part of its transforming secondary education agenda. Warwickshire has a sound track record in managing major projects. A capital strategy group represents schools' interests and informs priorities for capital investment.

Admissions

132. This was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation indicates that it continues to be so and this is supported by the outcomes of the school survey. No fieldwork was undertaken.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

133. Provision of education for pupils who have no school place was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation identified concerns about the provision of full-time education for excluded pupils. The LEA's officers have been able

to confirm that they now meet their statutory responsibilities in this area. The school survey rates the support provided as satisfactory. No fieldwork was carried out in the inspection. The indications are that the quality of support is being maintained. Support remains highly satisfactory.

Attendance

134. Support for schools on attendance was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. No fieldwork was carried out in the inspection. Currently, attendance in Warwickshire is above the average for similar authorities and the LEA's self-evaluation and the school survey rate the support provided as satisfactory. Support remains highly satisfactory.

Behaviour support

135. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's support for behaviour was considered satisfactory with strengths outweighing weaknesses. There has been progress since then and it is now highly satisfactory. The LEA's policy and practice continues to target pupils already expressing behavioural difficulties and those who are considered at risk. Responses to the school survey show that headteachers are positive about the support they receive in this area. Resources are appropriately targeted to areas of need and good practice is being disseminated.

136. The strategy for behaviour support is well embedded in the overall strategy for special educational needs. This coherent approach has been strengthened by the decision to recruit the Key Stage 3 behaviour consultants from within the learning and behaviour support service. The special educational needs and inclusion reference file contains relevant practical advice on addressing behavioural needs.

137. The resources for behavioural support have recently been delegated to schools and the learning and behaviour support service operates on a buy-back arrangement. Headteachers are clear about what services are available and how to access them. Support for behaviour was generally positively rated in the school survey. The pupil referral unit has recently had a positive inspection and the day school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties has been removed from special measures. Six of the seven schools that had learning support units have continued with this initiative, although the direct funding has ceased. The LEA remains an active partner in their support network. Support to schools for pupils with behavioural difficulties is provided locally through area behaviour panels (four secondary and two primary) and area monitoring meetings. The area panels ensure that support is directed to where the need is greatest.

138. While the LEA is exempt from having a behaviour support plan, the LEA's strategic plan includes targets in respect of the number of pupils returning to mainstream school from the pupil referral unit. Extensive targets and activities relating to exclusions and behaviour are included in the special educational needs and inclusion division plan and these are linked to the strategic plan. The rate of permanent exclusion was high for primary-age pupils. The

LEA has set a clear target to reduce permanent exclusions and early indications suggest that effective action has been taken. While the rate of permanent exclusions is projected to fall this year there are no indications of any fall in the pattern of fixed-term exclusions. The LEA is not able to identify at school or strategic level the total resource spent on support for behaviour. This affects its ability to determine the cost efficiency of its provision.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

139. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's support for health and safety was considered highly satisfactory. The LEA's self-evaluation and the school survey both suggest that it remains highly satisfactory. No fieldwork was carried out in the inspection and the indicators are that it remains highly satisfactory.

140. Support for child protection is considered unsatisfactory. While there is much evidence of good practice, the LEA's inability to identify readily which school staff have recently undergone training is a fundamental weakness. There are three separate databases used to record training provided to designated teachers. These have not been integrated and the LEA does not have a clear understanding of schools' training needs.

141. The LEA contributes fully to the work of the area child protection committee. It provides appropriate guidance to schools and has complemented the more formal procedures with a simple laminated flowchart for staff room display and an easily understood leaflet. Links with social services are strong and there was evidence that schools' concerns about accessing support from social services had been followed up.

Recommendation

In order to ensure that the welfare of vulnerable children is secured the LEA needs, as a matter of urgency, to:

- develop an integrated database on training for teachers on child protection and a clear strategy for responding to the information it provides.

Looked after children

142. Support for looked after children was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation and responses to the school survey indicate that the support provided is satisfactory. No fieldwork was carried out in the inspection. The indications are that the quality of support is being maintained. The attainment of looked after children is a local public service agreement target and the performance of looked after children is monitored by elected members. Support remains highly satisfactory.

Measures to combat racism

143. No judgement was made on this area of activity at the time of the last inspection. Support provided by the council is highly satisfactory. There are many areas of strength and few weaknesses. Officers and members have demonstrated good leadership in this area and have taken positive action to promote equality and value the contributions made by different cultures. The commitment is reflected in the LEA's strategic plan that has relevant activities contributing to both the performance management strategy and the community learning strategy. Actions focus on achieving clear targets in respect of equality in the recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff, governors and the LEA's staff. Following an LEA initiative the number of school governors from minority ethnic backgrounds rose from 42 in January 2002 to the current level of 74. The LEA's support for combating racism was rated very highly by both primary and secondary schools in the school survey.

144. There is a very good website on race equality that provides examples of celebrating diversity and good links to other sites. A wide range of training is available to schools. The LEA has a good strategic analysis of the pattern and distribution of minority ethnic groups and is aware of the differing needs of different communities and the particular issues relating to individuals who are isolated within rural communities. Where community groups exist they are engaged in contributing to developments in policy and practice.

145. The LEA monitors and follows up incidents of racial harassment. Schools are required to report all incidents immediately to the LEA and support is provided. There is no requirement for all schools to make an annual return to the LEA. The LEA initiated a campaign against racial harassment in school. The county council has formally and positively responded to the recommendations of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It has made a clear and positive commitment against institutional racism and has implemented a sound action plan. Schools were provided with model policies to embrace the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Although monitoring of minority ethnic staffing in the LEA takes place and appropriate targets have been set, the education directorate, and many other directorates, have not yet reached level 2 of the council for racial equality standards.

146. The LEA and the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education work well together and sent sensitive and supportive letters to schools at times of potential tension, such as after the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 and before the recent war in Iraq.

Recommendation

In order to ensure that the monitoring of racial harassment remains a high profile activity and that any under-identification is avoided the LEA should:

- develop, in conjunction with schools and other parties, a protocol to ensure that all schools submit a completed annual return to the LEA on this issue.

Section 5: Corporate Issues

Introduction to corporate issues

147. At the time of the last inspection most aspects of corporate management and leadership were good with none less than highly satisfactory. Since then corporate strategic planning has improved, decision-making processes have sharpened, partnership arrangements have become more effective and, in particular, leadership of members has strengthened. Corporate support for education services is now very good and provides a secure platform for further service improvement.

Corporate planning

148. Corporate planning processes have improved from an already strong position at the time of the last inspection. The clarity and coherence of plans have improved and they are now good. The council's performance in implementing corporate plans is also good.

149. The overarching shared vision, common values and agreed strategic objectives for education are well embedded throughout the planning process. Local public service agreement targets provide a balanced set of aims for corporate planning. The establishment of area committees, along with the development of the LEA's community learning plans, is leading to a greater local focus for departmental and corporate planning. Education issues continue to be at the heart of the council's strategic developments and the relationships between school improvement and council's other strategies, for example to promote social inclusion and lifelong learning, are clearly described. Senior education officers and members work closely with other departments in providing the education dimension for crosscutting strategies. The co-ordination of planning has improved with the introduction of the education strategic plan, but the extent to which activities are interdependent is still variable.

150. Since 1999 improving the design and coherence of corporate and strategic management processes has been a corporately led priority and senior education officers have taken leading roles. A clear, well-structured and comprehensive corporate planning cycle has been established that effectively links performance management and planning activity. Financial and corporate planning cycles are efficiently co-ordinated to ensure coherence. The introduction of the corporate business plan and the LEA's strategic plan have improved the quality and clarity of the linkage between corporate and departmental planning. There are some inconsistencies between the specific targets for education included in the LEA's strategic plan and in the corporate business plan. However, these have not caused confusion for members or managers about what is expected of the education department and schools. The high standard of planning and performance management at corporate and departmental level is not so evident at service level where the alignment of service planning and cost-centre management is weaker and the quality of service plans is variable.

151. The comprehensive performance management framework to support the implementation of corporate plans has been developed systematically and carefully implemented over several years. Within the education department monitoring the progress of

planned activities and achievement of targets has been considerably enhanced by the provision of regular clear reports for every activity within the plan. This has enabled ready access to up-to-date detailed performance information for a wide set of stakeholders including senior managers, elected members and staff in schools.

Decision making

152. At the time of the last inspection the speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision making at corporate level was highly satisfactory. Since then the quality of decision making has improved and is now very good.

153. The well-established budget process dovetails with the corporate and service planning and review cycles. This ensures that decisions that affect the construction of the budget are consistent with corporate and departmental objectives. Roles and responsibilities of members and managers are well defined and understood. The three-year medium-term financial strategy has ensured education and social services budgets have been protected from budget cuts and has provided a much more stable context for financial decision making at all levels.

154. The LEA has established a very strong process of consultation on budget matters. The level of awareness within schools of the council's budget position has been honed during the years when the LEA led a campaign to get a better recognition of the needs of its schools in central government grant distribution. The responses of headteachers to the school survey and during interviews confirmed the high regard headteachers have for the LEA's financial management. The understanding of the relationship between needs and resources is apparent in the reported quality of discussion and debate on the funding formula. The LEA has a track record of making necessary but difficult decisions. For example, it provided almost £1 million funding for early years over and above that provided within the Government grant settlement for 2003/2004 in the context of tight corporate financial constraints.

Leadership of elected members and officers

155. At the time of the previous inspection members provided good leadership and had a clear view of their role in supporting school improvement. Their leadership has improved from this already high base and it is now very good.

156. Elected members continue to place education at the very top of the council's corporate priorities and there is cross-party support for the council's vision for education. Members have continued to fund schools in excess of the funding allocated by central government in an attempt to compensate for the historically low level of government funding. Headteachers value the leadership given by members. The leader and the education spokespersons have ensured that the theme of education, and specifically school improvement, are embedded, where relevant, across all aspects of corporate working. For example, the development of community learning plans is a key element of the council's aim to delegate more decision-making and accountability processes to area committees. Members have also enthusiastically supported a policy of putting Warwickshire at the forefront of

innovation, for example in piloting strategic education planning and as a 14-19 Pathfinder for the Government's secondary transformation initiative.

157. Relationships between members and officers and members and headteachers and governors share similar levels of trust and mutual respect. Members took the lead in establishing an education liaison group of key stakeholders to ensure their continued participation in the development of county education policy and are also committed to establishing a strong schools forum. They have also given strong support to the commonwealth of schools initiative as a means of supporting collective schools' autonomy at area level.

158. Members are actively involved in the systematic and thorough monitoring of progress towards corporate objectives. Cabinet reviews performance reports twice yearly. The learning overview and scrutiny committee undertakes more detailed monitoring arrangements of progress in relation to relevant corporate education priorities. The leader and chief executive also undertake performance reviews of the work of the county education officer and education spokesperson, which reinforce other monitoring and evaluation processes.

159. Previously the leadership provided by officers was good and it remains good. Members hold the whole of the education department management team in high regard. The effectiveness of the leadership provided by officers received a very high rating in responses to the school survey. The county education officer is singled out for particular praise for embodying the values, principles and purpose of the education authority. The constructive partnership between senior education officers and headteachers and governors has strengthened still further since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the county education officer has not hesitated to use the full weight of his statutory powers to withdraw delegation from schools where and when warranted. He has also been fair but decisive when working with the departmental management team in making hard decisions during the budget-making process.

160. Services to support school improvement have been generally well led and this has been critical to the LEA's success in reducing the number of schools in need of intervention. Support for schools causing concern has been very well led at all levels and has focused on embedding sustainable long-term solutions. Senior officers have displayed initiative in leading developments in schools and other aspects of education. Senior managers have high expectations of their staff and the commitment to the improvement of schools is shared across all aspects of the work of the education department. However, the leadership of the LEA's officers is not as effective in responding to some aspects of the changing context for school improvement. In particular, the potential for using improved performance data to better focus support on schools' needs has yet to be fully exploited for the growing number of effective schools.

161. At the time of the previous inspection the quality of advice given to elected members was good and continues to be good. Reports to members are of a consistently high quality and are succinct, readable, timely and, where relevant, supported by well-informed professional analysis. Options are objectively and thoroughly analysed to provide members with a good basis for decision making. These features were exemplified well in the reports to members during the 2003/2004 budget process where detailed analysis of the implications of alternative courses of action were well set out. In addition to committee reports, members

with responsibilities in education benefit from a monthly briefing from the county education officer and other senior officers. The quality of information provided to members of the learning overview and scrutiny committee is improving, but already provides them with a satisfactory basis upon which to hold education services to account and to have an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of schools.

Partnership

162. At the time of the last inspection the effectiveness of partnership arrangements was highly satisfactory with some excellent links resulting in successful initiatives, which were of real benefit to pupils and schools. Since then the LEA has made further progress in this area. The LEA's arrangements for working with partners are now good.

163. The development of partnership working is a key theme within the council's corporate priorities and the increasing engagement of the community was reported in the Audit Commission's December 2002 corporate assessment. At a strategic level Warwickshire is seen to have shown good leadership, particularly in those partnerships most relevant to education. For example, education officers have taken the lead in developing the effective Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and are also leading most of the associated Sure Start partnerships. Broad-based and well-structured arrangements for collaboration between schools and further education institutions, employers and training providers are strengths of the LEA's 14 – 19 support. Relationships between the LEA and the diocesan authorities continue to be excellent and productive.

164. The LEA's highly organised approach to partnership, apparent during the last inspection, has been strengthened. A recently created children's strategic partnership board, including elected members from the council's cabinet works with the children and young persons officer group to develop, manage and monitor services. These new arrangements are intended to enhance the council's leadership of partnership working to support vulnerable children and, in particular, drive the implementation of the council's strategic plan for vulnerable children. This development anticipates the additional central government pressure for more co-ordinated multi-agency working in relation to vulnerable children. It builds upon the already effective liaison between education and social services, the police, local primary care trusts, Connexions, voluntary organisations and the local Learning and Skills Council.

165. The benefits of partnership working for schools and pupils are particularly evident in the coherence of support provided by education and social services for looked after children. An LEA facilitated local partnership in the Warwick district, including schools and National Children's Homes, has contributed to improved communication with, and support for, parents. A recent sharp increase in the number of pre-school full day places has been due to well organised partnership working between the LEA and the local Pre-School Learning Alliance. The development of community learning plans is providing a further stimulus to partnership working. While the plans are still in draft it is clear that they will provide a framework within which to develop area learning partnerships as a means of driving community education. They will also assist in bringing together coherently existing local networks and partnerships. These developments should enable schools to benefit more directly from partnership working.

Support for early years

166. This area was not reported on at the time of the last inspection. Support for early years in Warwickshire is very good. The LEA's leadership is very strong and support is effective, well targeted, innovative and appropriately focused on improving quality.

167. Warwickshire's commitment to supporting early years is long standing and is a key council priority and reflected in the council's 2001 local public service agreement. The LEA has consistently spent more on early years than government guidelines and has enthusiastically and successfully bid for an additional government grant. The partnership is on course to meet its 2004 target of providing 90 per cent of three year-olds with pre-school placements and for increasing the number of childcare places for children under three. Only delays in getting information from the criminal records bureau prevented the council from meeting targets for the increase in childcare places. Ofsted inspectors judged 96 per cent of early years/foundation stage provision in schools to be good or very good. Baseline assessment is well established and shows that standards at foundation level are improving.

168. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, led by one of the LEA's officers, is effective. Partnership structures are well established and effective at county and area level. Well-developed service level agreements have been established between the LEA and National Children's Homes, the National Childminders Association and the Pre-school Learning Alliance. The work of the partnership is well organised. A clear, succinct, and well focused Early Years and Childcare Development Plan puts appropriate emphasis on improving both the standards of attainment and the range and quality of provision. It is efficiently translated into well co-ordinated area level activity plans and targets. Monitoring, evaluation and review processes are well developed and effective and lead not only to remedial action, but also to support annual reappraisal, and where necessary, realignment of partnership working.

169. Arrangements for targeting the support of advisory teachers at areas of greatest need are effective. Imagination and innovation are clearly evident in the way the partnership and the LEA have sought to build the capacity to support early years at a local level, for example in establishing partnerships between primary schools and early years providers. An inter-agency pre-school and childcare special educational needs strategy group has led on the development of a comprehensive programme of support for pre-school providers through a network of area special educational needs co-ordinators. The range of services provided for young children and their families is increasing. Specific initiatives include: neighbourhood nurseries in the seven most disadvantaged wards, two early years excellence centres and is soon to open two children's centres. A timely Best Value review confirmed the high quality of support for early years, and the strength of the partnership. The Best Value review improvement plan provides a clear and well thought through programme of actions to meet the challenge of moving from developing to sustaining early years provision in the medium term.

Support for 14 – 19 education

170. This area was not inspected previously, but Warwickshire's support for 14-19

curriculum developments is highly satisfactory. The LEA's priority to raise standards of 14-19 year olds is clear in its strategic plan. It has communicated a vision of the skills needed by young people by the age of 19 in its 14-19 strategy document, jointly developed with the Local Learning and Skills Council. A review of provision across all providers has just begun in close partnership with the Local Learning and Skills Council and a joint action plan to address the needs of young people is planned. However, in its current plans, some aspects of the LEA's strategy to improve achievements at Key Stage 4 and post 16 are not well developed.

171. The LEA has collaborated well with local partners in developing its 14-19 strategy and has successfully encouraged schools to work closely with other providers to enrich the 14-19 curriculum. The support given to schools is sensitive to the local context. Partnership arrangements with Connexions are effective in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, although closer co-operation is needed to track those who leave compulsory schooling with unknown destinations. Through effective partnership working the LEA has secured significant funding to extend learning opportunities and is a lead partner in a 14-19 Pathfinder project. Officers are knowledgeable and effective in their work to support developments for the 14 – 19 age group. There have been many staff development opportunities to raise awareness of initiatives, but an analysis of the needs of school managers to develop the 14-19 curriculum has not been undertaken.

172. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 4 have improved since 1998 in line with national trends and the LEA has consistently exceeded the Government's target for at least 38 per cent of young people to achieve five or more GCSE A*-C passes. The standards achieved by post-16 students are high compared with national averages and generally they achieve what is predicted for them on the basis of their previous attainment. Nevertheless, two of the 37 schools have less than 25 per cent of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A*-C. The gap in achievements between boys and girls at Key Stage 4 has remained constant and close to the national average over the last three years. The LEA has agreed a number of challenging targets for achievements at Key Stage 4 within the local public service agreement, including some for vulnerable groups. Targets for post-16 are less prominent in the LEA's plans. Teaching and learning in the schools make a strong contribution to high rates of progression to full-time further education and training. Key skills development is not consistent for sixth-form students.

173. There are many examples of 14-19 projects successfully supported by the LEA. Just over ten per cent of students at Key Stage 4 across the ability range are on collaborative provision with local further education colleges and other providers. Attendance rates have improved for this group of students. Others are studying new vocational qualifications or taking GCE AS levels early. Projects often reflect students' interests and many are work related. For example, a group of students is studying on a BTEC performing arts course in conjunction with the Royal Shakespeare Company. All students take part in a work readiness scheme. In some areas of the county vocational and work-related options are underdeveloped and not all students have sufficient information about the full range of post-16 options available to them, especially for work-related learning.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:

In order to ensure that the welfare of vulnerable children is secured the LEA needs, as a matter of urgency, to

- develop an integrated database on training for teachers on child protection and a clear strategy for responding to the information it provides.

In order to improve its support for the education of gifted and talented pupils the LEA should develop; in partnership with schools:

- a clear definition of gifted and talented;
- clear expectations for meeting the needs of pupils talented in non-academic areas;
- guidance on the role of co-ordinators and named governors; and
- a wider range of outcome measures.

However, the following recommendations are also fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

In order to improve the presentation of the links between the LEA's vision for education and priorities in the strategic plan:

- define more clearly the strategic objectives; and
- sharpen and simplify the analysis included within the rationale for the priorities.

In order to secure greater effectiveness in monitoring and challenging schools:

- identify the reasons where the LEA's and schools' targets differ; and
- ensure link inspectors' support for setting targets focuses on schools setting robust, challenging, but realistic, targets.

In order to improve support for information and communication technology:

- in agreement with schools and colleges, develop systems to collect and analyse data regularly to identify progress in relation to the LEA's targets for Key Stages 1 and 2 and Key Skills Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications; and
- provide guidance to enable primary schools to confidently assign pupils' work to National Curriculum levels.

In order to develop a coherent strategy to meet predicted recruitment and retention needs:

- establish robust systems to analyse the workforce data to better inform strategic planning for medium- and long-term recruitment and retention needs.

In order to ensure that pupils with special educational needs, who do not have the protection of statements, have effective provision the LEA should:

- in partnership with schools monitor the provision made by schools for those pupils, evaluate its effectiveness and the outcomes achieved.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to ensure that the monitoring of racial harassment remains a high profile activity and that any under-identification is avoided the LEA should:

- develop, in conjunction with schools and other parties, a protocol to ensure that all schools submit a completed annual return to the LEA on this issue.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

Name of LEA :	Warwickshire
LEA number:	937
Name of Inspector:	Robert Barr
Date of Inspection:	May 2003 e.g Apr 02

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	2	
2	The performance of schools	3	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	4	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	3	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	3	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	2	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	3	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	2	NI
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	4	
10	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	2	NI
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	3	
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	2	

14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	2	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	3	NI
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	5	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	4	
19	Support to school governors	2	NI
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	3	
20a	Financial services	1	NI
20b	Human resources	2	NI
20c	Property services	3	
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	3	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	4	
20f	Grounds maintenance	4	
20g	Catering	3	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	4	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	2	NI
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	3	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	2	NI
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	2	NI
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	2	

27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	4	
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	2	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	3	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	1	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	3	NI
No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	3	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	NI
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	3	NI
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	NI
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	3	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	5	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	3	NI
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	3	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	2	

44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	2	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	1	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	1	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	2	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	2	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	2	