

Inspection report
RUTLAND
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: May 2003

© Crown copyright 2003. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

A report from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in conjunction with the Audit Commission.

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the respective local education authority.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Reference:

Contents

Basic information about the LEA

Introduction	1
Commentary	2

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context	4
Performance	4
Council structure	5
Funding	5
The LEA's strategy for school improvement	7
The allocation of resources to priorities	8
Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	9

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary	10
The effectiveness of services to support school improvement	10
Monitoring, challenge and intervention	11
The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need	12
The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools	12
The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools	13
Support for literacy	14
Support for numeracy	14
Support for information and communication technology (ICT)	15
Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3	15
Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers	15
Support for gifted and talented pupils	16
Support for governors	17
Support for school management	18
Support for early years	18
Support for 14-19 education	19
The effectiveness of services to support school management	20
The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	21

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary	22
Strategy	22
Statutory obligations	23
SEN functions to support school improvement	23

Value for money	24
-----------------	----

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary	25
The strategy to promote social inclusion	25
The supply of school places	25
Asset management	26
Admissions	26
Provision of education for pupils who have no school place	27
Attendance	27
Behaviour support	28
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	28
Looked after children	28
Measures to combat racism	29

Section 5: Corporate issues

Summary	31
Corporate planning	31
Decision making	31
The leadership provided by officers and elected members	32
Partnership	33

Appendix 1: Recommendations	35
------------------------------------	----

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection	38
--	----

Basic information

Name of LEA:	Rutland Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	Rutland County Council Catmose, Oakham RUTLAND LE15 6HP
Lead inspector:	Vic Chivers
Date of inspection:	May 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Rutland 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. The material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports; audit reports and documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members, groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments in the authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on the LEA published in September 1999. A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to schools and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 57 per cent.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement which 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 numeric 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 numeric 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 Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated regularly such that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next assessment.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of all 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. Rutland is a satisfactory LEA, as it was when previously inspected in 1999. At the time of the last inspection, the authority was only two years old and since then problems associated with its small size have become more evident. It has not made the progress it should have done. Senior officers have been stretched to meet the full range of schools' needs and consequently have found it difficult to work strategically, at the same time as handling day-to-day operational matters. Difficulties have also occurred in communicating effectively with schools. There have been signs of recent improvement and it is vital that this momentum is sustained.

7. Education remains the council's top priority; a commitment strongly reiterated by the new lead member following the recent council elections. Standards in end-of-key stage tests are mostly above the national average, and since the previous inspection good progress has been made in promoting inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Senior officers and elected members have improved their knowledge of schools and support for school improvement has focused more sharply on assisting schools with difficulties. High levels of support for governors, schools' financial management and pupil attendance have also been maintained.

8. Compared to other LEAs, the percentage of good and very good primary schools is well below average, suggesting that standards in some schools should be higher. The LEA has been both pro-active and successful in identifying weaknesses in school management and in rectifying some of these. However, not all schools have welcomed the LEA when it has challenged them to improve. One reason for this is that the LEA has not explained its role sufficiently clearly to schools. A recurring theme during the inspection was that the LEA is not consistently transparent when discussing its plans. In such a small authority, contact between members or officers and schools at a personal level is relatively easy and this is a strength. A consequence, however, is that formal structures are sometimes by-passed, with the result that some headteachers and governors feel their views are under-valued. Coupled with the reluctance on the part of some schools to accept the role of the LEA to challenge, this has impeded efforts to establish a real sense of partnership.

9. As a small authority, the council faces a continuing challenge to maintain a sufficiently viable central capability to support schools. While the LEA has been creative in ensuring that key support functions are carried out and the increased use of external consultants has helped it to strengthen its capacity, reasons for retaining central control of some items of expenditure have not been sufficiently explicit. Rutland is one of very few LEAs which still provide support for school improvement at no cost to school budgets. This approach is unsustainable. The LEA is not yet totally clear which school improvement services it will provide centrally and which others will be brokered or provided externally. While it is appropriate to provide weaker schools with support at no cost to their budgets, the more successful ones should have the freedom to purchase support to meet their specific needs.

Strengths

There are particular strengths in:

- support for governors;
- provision of financial services;
- meeting statutory obligations in respect of pupils with SEN;
- supporting the inclusion of pupils with SEN in schools;
- asset management planning;
- support for attendance; and
- support for health and safety, welfare and child protection.

Weaknesses

The majority of the LEA's functions are carried out to a satisfactory standard. However, the following weaknesses remain:

- consultation with schools on monitoring, challenge and intervention;
- support for minority ethnic pupils;
- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- support for pupils who have no school place;
- support for children in public care; and
- measures to combat racism.

10. The council has shown itself willing to take difficult decisions, for example, in closing one school and establishing joint management of two others under one headteacher. However, elected members are under pressure to carry out the full range of corporate functions despite the small size of the authority. Partly for this reason, corporate decisions are not consistently evaluated for their effect on improving service quality. Members are involved in monitoring and reviewing plans, but the education, youth and culture scrutiny panel has not yet focused on the standards achieved by schools and pupils.

11. The CPA, published in December 2002, gave the education service three stars (the highest category) for current performance. The relatively high levels of pupils' achievement, the good levels of pupils' attendance and the high rate of pupils staying on in education post-16, were important factors in this assessment. The weaknesses in the effectiveness of the LEA's strategies to promote continuous improvement, identified in the previous inspection, contributed to this aspect being given a lower (two star) rating.

12. This inspection's findings are that the LEA has now embraced Best Value approaches and that its capacity to make improvement is sound. To make progress, however, the LEA must more consistently direct its efforts at where they can be most effective. To this end, senior officers must more clearly separate their strategic role from their operational functions, giving a higher priority to the former. To strengthen partnership working, elected members, LEA officers, schools and other partners must recognize and agree their respective and complementary roles and how these will be effective in supporting pupils. If it is successful, the LEA will confirm its capacity to secure a better deal for its young people. If not, opportunities will have been missed and the LEA's potential will be left unfulfilled.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

13. The basic characteristics of the LEA are unchanged since the last inspection. Rutland remains the smallest mainland LEA, serving a socio-economically advantaged¹ thinly populated area where unemployment is low². The population is just under 35000, having increased by 1.5 per cent since 1999³. Almost one third of the population lives in the urban area of Oakham. Eligibility for free school meals is well below average in both primary and secondary schools. The percentage of pupils of minority ethnic heritage is low. The proportion of pupils with statements of SEN is well below average.

14. There are 21 maintained schools, comprising 17 primary schools (four community; nine voluntary controlled; three voluntary aided; and, one foundation), three secondary community colleges (all foundation) and one special nursery⁴. Four of the primary schools have rolls below 90 and none of the secondary colleges has a sixth form. The presence of two military bases causes turbulence in the local pupil population, affecting both planning and learning in several of the schools. Average attainment on entry to primary schools is well above average.

Performance

15. Standards of attainment were satisfactory at the last inspection and remain satisfactory overall. Standards in national tests at all key stages are mostly above the national average. Attendance levels are high and permanent exclusion rates are better than in most other LEAs. However, Ofsted Section 10 inspection judgements show that the proportion of good or very good primary schools is well below the national average. This suggests that, although pupils' standards of attainment are generally high, in a minority of schools they should be much higher.

16. Results from the 2002 national tests⁵ show that at the end of Key Stage 1 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or above was below both the national average and statistical neighbours⁶ in reading and writing, but above in mathematics. Three-year trends show improvement failing to match statistical neighbours. At the end of Key Stage 2, the

¹ Rutland is 337th out of 354 authorities in the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions Index of Multiple Deprivation.

² 0.6 per cent

³ The 2001 Census (first release data)

⁴ In January 2002 there were 4939 pupils, (4553 in 1998) in the LEA's maintained schools, of which 2596 (2434 in 1998) were in primary schools and 2343 (2119) in secondary schools.

⁵ Small numbers and the inclusion of some pupils who perhaps would otherwise be disappplied from the tests make direct comparisons difficult.

⁶ Rutland's statistical neighbour authorities are: Bracknell Forest, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Herefordshire, North Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, Wiltshire and Windsor & Maidenhead.

proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 4 was above national figures in all subject areas, with the English results the third highest in the country and the rate of improvement over the last three years is above that of similar LEAs.

17. At the end of Key Stage 3, the 2002 results show the proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 5 to be at least in line with statistical neighbours and above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Results in mathematics were the second highest in the country and improvement in English was above the national average. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C was in line with statistical neighbours and well above the national average. The improvement rate was above the national average and well above statistical neighbours. Progress in responding to the recommendation in the last report to improve attainment in secondary schools has been satisfactory.

18. When last inspected by Ofsted, almost half the schools were found to require some improvement. Despite some progress having been made, the proportion of schools judged to be good or very good remains well below both national and statistical neighbours' figures. Although the number is small, the percentage of schools requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses since 1997 is above average. The proportion of schools currently giving the LEA cause for concern is also high.

19. Unauthorised and authorised absence in Rutland schools remains below the national average. Permanent exclusions are also below average, although fixed-term exclusions in the secondary sector are high.

Council structure

20. Following the recent local elections, the council has 26 elected members: 13 Conservative, eight Independent, four Liberal Democrats and one vacancy pending a by-election. The council cabinet comprises six members (the leader and five portfolio holders) and meets on a weekly basis. There are four scrutiny panels which meet every two months. The chief executive leads a corporate management team of four directors. At the previous inspection and until the recent elections, members did not operate as party political groups.

21. Since the previous inspection, the education department has been restructured as the department of education, youth and culture, with a director and five second tier posts; covering school effectiveness, inclusion, access and communications, learning and skills and cultural services. Duties and responsibilities have been reviewed and re-allocated, in response to national initiatives, e.g. early years and childcare development; and to reflect the amalgamation with libraries, museums, youth and sport. Within each section of the department most officers have wide-ranging responsibilities.

Funding

22. At the last inspection, the overall funding of education was well below average. Although it remains below average, the authority has continued to fund education above the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). The total education budget in 2002/3 was £15.3 million, i.e. 8.7 per cent above SSA. Since the previous inspection, increases in SSA have

been passed through to education each year except 2001/02. The 2003/4 budget showing funding at 6.8 per cent above the Formula Spending Share is reflected in school budgets.

23. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has acknowledged the particular needs of the LEA as a small unitary authority by providing additional funding amounting to £1.9 million over the six years up to and including 2002/3. Capital expenditure in education for 2002/3 was initially set at £1.8 million. However, further approval has doubled the capital resources and an additional DfES grant will improve science facilities in the secondary sector.

24. The funding received by schools shows that primary and secondary pupils are funded below the national average, but above their statistical neighbours:

	Rutland £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary individual schools budget (ISB)	2,150	2,074	2,153	2,223
Secondary ISB	2,828	2,740	2,852	2,940

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data2002/3.

25. Within the education budget, maximising access to Standards Fund grant money has been a high priority. In 2002/3, delegation of the Local Schools budget was 87 per cent, in line with similar authorities and just above the national average. In the same year, there was a Standards Fund programme of £2.3m, with LEA-matched funding of £0.6m. The LEA also received a range of external funding, including New Opportunities Fund, School Standards Grant, Children's Fund and the SEN Small Programme Fund.

26. Expenditure on centrally-provided services in 2002/3 was in line with the national average, but well below that of statistical neighbours:

	Rutland £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Strategic management	87	84	93	101
School improvement	16	27	26	31
Access	227	178	124	131
SEN	89	162	151	160
Total	419	451	394	423

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data2002/3.

27. Access costs are nearly twice the national average and are particularly high for home-to-school transport. Funding per pupil for SEN has fallen since the last inspection, following further delegation to schools. School improvement expenditure is in the bottom five of unitary councils and almost half the national average. However, school improvement activities are also heavily supported by the retention of Standards Fund resources.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

28. The LEA's strategy for school improvement was previously satisfactory. Its current strategy, as contained in the Education Development Plan (EDP) is now highly satisfactory. The plan is sound and based upon a detailed and thorough audit. Links to other plans are made clearly and implementation is progressing satisfactorily.

29. Strategies for SEN and social inclusion are woven into the five national priorities in the plan. There are also three local priorities, including support for leadership, management and governance. These match the LEA's stated objective to support the development of self-managing, self-improving schools. The overall costs are satisfactory and below those for unitary authorities. The total costs for each priority are shown in the plan, but there is no indication of how these costs have been compiled.

30. The audit shows satisfactory progress having been made in implementing the first EDP, especially in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Particular progress has also been made in developing inclusion in schools. The LEA has identified a weakness in the use of data on the prior attainment of pupils in schools and has rightly included further work on this aspect within the national priorities of its new plan.

31. Procedures to evaluate the progress made in implementing the EDP are satisfactory. There are good and measurable success criteria. Termly monitoring reports, with a half yearly review of progress, are made by a group comprising officers, headteachers, governors and an elected member.

32. Target setting at pupil level is agreed with headteachers. Aggregations of school targets have produced some discrepancies with agreed LEA targets, many of which for 2004 are challenging and unlikely to be met. The 2002 results in Key Stage 2 mathematics met the target set for 2003, but this still leaves a nine point gap to be filled to reach the 2004 target of 90 per cent. The results at Key Stage 3 English have left a gap of fourteen points to be filled if the 2004 target of 85 per cent is to be achieved. At GCSE (for pupils achieving at least five grades A*-C), there was a gap of seven points between the 2002 results and the 2004 target.

The allocation of resources to priorities

33. The overall targeting of resources to priorities was highly satisfactory at the last inspection. It is still satisfactory, but the allocation of resources is not sufficiently understood by schools and consultation with schools on council budget priorities is a weakness. Spending on education fully reflects the council's strategic aims and the school funding formula is clear, straightforward and needs-based. Despite impending changes to national funding, the LEA has not yet undertaken a fundamental review of its core activities and how these will be funded once Standards Fund resources are transferred into the main grant. The Schools Forum, which has so far only met once, has also still to be consulted on this process.

34. The LEA has met all government targets in every year except one. The council as a whole is moving to a medium term financial strategy over a three-year cycle, as recommended by the Audit Commission's recent corporate assessment. This will enable both the LEA and schools to look more strategically at financial planning, and to focus resources to priorities beyond an annual cycle of budget setting. The socio-economic context of the LEA limits access to external funding. Successful bids for extra resources have been made in conjunction with schools, but specific resources to support grant bidding have not been identified.

35. Budget making is accurate and there is effective monitoring enabling remedial action when required. Schools are supported and monitored in their budget setting and are required to account for any high surpluses. Specifically, any surplus above five per cent is highlighted and an action plan is also agreed to address any deficit.

Recommendation

In order to increase the transparency and understanding of the priorities for budget setting:

- consult schools fully on budget priorities, the timetable for budget planning and the central retention of national grants.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

36. The LEA's strategies to promote continuous improvement were unsatisfactory at the last inspection. They are now satisfactory and sound progress has been made in adopting Best Value approaches. A more cross-cutting approach has meant that Best Value reviews are more clearly linked to the strategic aims of the council. The council has also commissioned external agencies with proven expertise to support service improvement. The Best Value Performance Plan is a detailed document, which sets out the aims and objectives of the council clearly and which received unqualified approval from the external auditor. However, the plan does not focus on specific outcomes sufficiently and the prioritisation of activities is often unclear.

37. The education service employs Best Value reviews as a means of helping to improve services. Reviews of SEN and school meals have been undertaken and elected members responded positively to the reports on both of these. Following publication of the school meals report, the service is the subject of a tendering exercise. A range of other activities are undertaken to help ensure continuous improvement, including corporate guidance to support managers in reviewing service performance.

38. The LEA has a well established performance management system that links corporate and key service plans and translates these plans into targets for individual officers. There are regular reports to the senior management team on the progress of most of the key performance indicators and plan objectives. Employees' development plans form the basis for individual appraisals and these are linked to service plans. In addition to Best Value reviews, various other improvement activities focus on areas at risk or under-performance. School transport costs are reviewed annually and work is currently underway to improve the co-ordination of primary school admissions and to develop measures to ensure better value for money in services purchased from outside. Following the previous inspection, a full review of the personnel service was carried out, resulting in the activities of the service being commissioned from an external provider.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary

39. Since the previous inspection, the targeting of support for schools causing concern has improved and there have been effective developments to support pupils with SEN and inclusion. Management services provide highly satisfactory support, helping headteachers and governing bodies to concentrate on their principal task of school improvement. Supporting school improvement is, rightly, the main focus of the LEA's work. However, its efforts to respond to a very wide range of requests for support from schools means that centrally held resources are currently too thinly stretched. By not defining or prioritising clearly enough its key functions in supporting schools, the LEA has created circumstances where energies of staff are spread too widely, with the result that the potential impact of their actions is not maximised.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

40. Operational leadership and planning to support school improvement are sound, particularly in providing a wide and increasing range of support to meet national and local requirements.

41. Support is provided by a team of 21 staff, only four of whom are employed in full-time posts. Only one post in the school effectiveness team is fully funded from the base budget, while most are funded from centrally retained elements of the Standards Fund. While this arrangement presently works well, it will become unsustainable as Standards Fund is steadily reduced over the next few years.

42. To reflect the changing demands of national strategies, there are plans to alter the structure of the school effectiveness team from September 2003. These developments should help further to improve the deployment of staff and their capacity to judge the impact of their work.

43. The school effectiveness team has a satisfactory range of expertise to meet its main tasks of supporting improvement through the national strategies. External consultancy is used to provide a wider range of expertise and also to strengthen capacity. The deployment of the team is satisfactory, especially given the part-time nature of most of the posts. The team has responded well to new initiatives, although the expectation in the EDP that all schools can obtain support from officers upon demand at no charge does not match the LEA's differentiated system of entitlement, with the consequence that workloads are heavy and difficult to plan.

44. Performance management is built well into the operation of the team. Half-yearly staff review meetings focus on revising personal objectives to reflect new service priorities. There are termly team meetings, which share good information on progress of all schools. New staff are provided with a comprehensive induction pack, which contains corporate and team objectives.

45. The school effectiveness team has made an effective contribution to raising standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy and in giving good targeted support to some schools where concerns have been identified. Value for money provided by the service is satisfactory.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of services to support school improvement:

- clarify the sources of current and future funding, to ensure that continuity of support is maintained as funding sources change.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

46. The principles set by the LEA for monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools are sound. However, the LEA has failed to share fully the rationale and details of the strategy with schools, and this is unsatisfactory. As a result, progress made since the last inspection has been too slow.

47. The core review group comprises key officers representing the full range of functions across the LEA, the portfolio holder and diocesan representatives. The group conducts termly reviews of the strengths and weaknesses in all schools and decides the level of support entitlement that should be provided. Schools are placed into one of seven grades, five of which relate to varying levels of concern. Since autumn 2002, an additional grade has been assigned to every school indicating its capacity to improve. The system is complex, but the strategy is sound and reflects satisfactorily the LEA's role in targeting its resources on schools most needing support to improve.

48. The LEA did not consult openly with schools on the development and detail of the core review group strategy. Many headteachers remain unclear about the interpretation of each grade and the support that is assigned to it. Some also remain unclear about the steps that they need to take to improve their grade and several headteachers express concern about the relative weight assigned to issues identified by the LEA as causes for concern. This situation is unsatisfactory.

49. The gradual emergence of the core review scheme over the last two years has damaged the partnership between schools and the LEA. Headteachers accept the need for the LEA to target its expertise on those schools requiring it most, but many feel rightly that they and their governing body can contribute to the review of each school, thereby linking their own self-evaluation and development planning to the LEA review. The core review group produces a very clear and succinct internal report on each school, which provides summary data on attainment, finance, inclusion and identifies key issues and action points, but these reports have not yet been shared with headteachers and governing bodies.

*Recommendations***In order to strengthen the strategy for monitoring, challenge and intervention:**

- reduce the number of grades used in the monitoring, challenge and support strategy;
- identify the triggers for inclusion clearly in each of the categories;
- publish all component parts of the strategy for supporting schools in a single document for headteachers and their government bodies; and
- incorporate schools' self-evaluation in the review process and use the results as the basis of an agreement for action and support with the schools.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

50. With improved gathering of knowledge of schools through the core review group, there is a satisfactory focus on schools that most need support to improve. The entitlement of schools to support is defined clearly and it is suitably differentiated. Notes of contacts and visits are recorded, with actions points and responsibilities identified. These are copied to headteachers and chairs of governors.

51. However, an important weakness remains. All support from officers is currently at no cost to school budgets and successful schools can call upon officers whenever they feel that external expertise will assist the school in meeting its objectives. While there are occasions when unplanned support is required, it is unsatisfactory to continue to offer officer time to all schools without cost, while also implementing a differentiated scheme of support based on need. This arrangement places great pressure on the small team of officers to respond, and does not encourage the development of skills within schools to become informed purchasers of services.

*Recommendation***In order to focus resources upon greatest need:**

- implement the differentiated scheme of support and negotiate with schools methods of providing additional support to schools, either from LEA staff or from brokered services, through a costed agreement.

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

52. The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools is satisfactory, but there are some weaknesses. The work of the core review group ensures that information on all schools is reviewed each term, providing a valuable method of identifying problems at an early stage. Despite the weakness in the method of introducing the strategy

for monitoring, challenge and support, the LEA now has a good knowledge of its schools and has taken steps consistently to resolve shortcomings in school leadership and management.

53. The previous inspection report recommended that the secondary colleges should be more effectively challenged about their performance. Although some progress has been made, outcomes have been variable. There are still differences in the extent to which headteachers and governing bodies accept the responsibilities of the LEA in carrying out this work and efforts to overcome this problem are necessarily continuing.

54. Under previous arrangements, schools were assigned a senior officer in a link role, which was primarily a point of contact between the LEA and the school. This role has been discontinued for the first six months of 2003 in response to consultation with headteachers who also identified a variability in the range and depth of challenge that these officers could provide. The LEA is to review with schools the future mechanisms for formal links during the summer term. This review is urgent, not least for the planning of staff deployment, because it is not yet clear how the important work on target setting and review of school development plans that will contribute to LEA planning is to be accomplished in the autumn term.

55. There are weaknesses in the availability and application of data. The data file provided to schools is welcomed by headteachers, but there is not yet a central system to analyse and track the progress of individual pupils and cohorts, including under-performing groups, and there is no local data on value added performance between the key stages. The lack of a system to collate and analyse individual pupil data means that links between pupil attainment and social inclusion are not advanced, and measuring the precise effects of pupil mobility is impaired. A new electronic system of data analysis is scheduled to be operational in time for the 2003-4 academic year.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenging schools:

- provide early notice to schools about how the work on challenging and supporting target setting and development planning is to be provided from September 2003; and
- implement a system for data collection and analysis at individual pupil level and consult schools on the additional data required at school level to analyse the performances of specific groups and cohorts.

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

56. The effectiveness of the LEA's work in under-performing schools is highly satisfactory and progress has been maintained since the last inspection. Support for schools subject to special measures or serious weaknesses has been of good quality. When a school is identified as a cause for concern, it is offered a review and support from an external consultant. Headteachers are very positive about this system and there is good evidence of

strong challenge and effective support being provided as a result. Termly monitoring meetings for headteachers and chairs of governors from these schools with senior officers are also supportive and productive. Once the schools leave these categories, support is gradually reduced.

57. Despite past weaknesses in the early identification of weaknesses in school management, the LEA now has a good knowledge of its schools and this aspect has improved. The LEA presently has four schools which are causing concern and another four schools where there are specific issues to address. The proportion of schools causing concern is high, but this reflects the determination on the part of the LEA to now ensure that concerns are identified at an early stage. However, even this stronger identification process did not prevent one school slipping from serious weaknesses into special measures in 2002, despite well targeted support from the LEA.

58. One primary school is currently subject to special measures and one primary school, identified with serious weaknesses, is now awaiting a further inspection. All schools previously identified have made the requisite progress within eighteen months.

Support for literacy

59. Support for literacy was highly satisfactory at the last inspection. No detailed fieldwork was carried out in this area, but recent Ofsted inspection evidence confirms that it remains so.

60. Although attainment in reading and writing at Key Stage 1 is below the national average, the proportion of pupils gaining level 4 or better in English at Key Stage 2 is above both the averages nationally and in similar authorities, demonstrating good progress between the two key stages. At Key Stage 3, attainment is above the national average, but below that found in similar authorities.

61. Progress in literacy is carefully monitored by the LEA. It knows the strengths and weaknesses in the schools and targets its support well, particularly in tailoring support to the needs of under-performing schools. There is a satisfactory focus on transition between Key Stages 2 and 3. A good mixture of types of training is provided, including some joint training for Key Stage 3 with a neighbouring LEA. Consultant support is deployed and managed efficiently and effectively, and well-regarded by schools.

Support for numeracy

62. Support for numeracy was highly satisfactory at the last inspection. No detailed fieldwork was carried out, but other recent Ofsted inspection evidence confirms that it remains so.

63. The LEA's strategy for raising standards is clear and well understood by schools. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory or better and are improving in line with or above the national average, and achievable targets for further improvement have been set for 2004. Management and deployment of support is efficient and effective and the consultants serve the schools well.

64. Since the last inspection, the targeting of support for primary schools has been further refined and there is a very good awareness and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each school, particularly in areas of leadership and management and quality of teaching and learning. The LEA tailors training and support appropriately to meet schools' needs and there is a good mix of formal training, one-to-one coaching and twilight support.

65. Appropriate areas have been identified for targeted support, including high attaining pupils, gender issues and assessment. Good use has been made of external consultants to provide additional support for schools, particularly those considered to be underachieving or causing concern.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

66. Support for information and communication technology across the curriculum was highly satisfactory at the last inspection. No fieldwork was carried out, but evidence from the LEA's self evaluation and from the school survey confirms that it remains so.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

67. The LEA's support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Attainment in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 is consistently above national figures and performance in similar authorities. Attainment in English has marginally improved since the last inspection, but is below that in similar authorities.

68. An internal review in 2002 identified some weakness in the impact of the initial implementation of the national strategy and the LEA responded swiftly to change the pattern of support. The revised approach is more coherent and has helped the LEA to provide consistent challenge in its drive to raise attainment.

69. The strategy is effectively managed and monitored. Consultants have relevant expertise and command respect in the secondary colleges. Their work is now organised in six week blocks involving every strand of the strategy and is already helping to improve teaching and learning. Training has been delivered in partnership with neighbouring LEAs, although its effect has been lessened by difficulties in staff being released to attend events. Teachers' development days have been used for joint conferences for all college staff.

70. The LEA has made transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 a high priority. A transition action plan has been developed which focuses on the curriculum, the use of data and teaching and learning. Early problems, where colleges were not fully involved in planning, have now been largely overcome. A model of support first introduced in one of the three secondary colleges has been well received and provides a good platform for subsequent work in the other two.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

71. The LEA's support for ethnic minority groups and Travellers was not inspected in 1999. As the percentage of pupils involved is low, the LEA does not receive a grant for work in this field. However, support is unsatisfactory and progress has been too slow.

72. The authority has sent, to all schools, draft policies on supporting pupils from ethnic minorities but has no systematic knowledge of whether these have been adopted, or the impact they are having. Similarly, although the authority collected data on the attainment of pupils from different ethnic heritages for the first time in 2002, it has not analysed this information effectively. As a result, it is unaware of trends or patterns that might need addressing. There is currently no routine reporting to elected members on the attainment of minority ethnic pupils.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for minority ethnic pupils:

- collect, analyse and routinely report to senior officers and members data on the attainment of such pupils, so that any patterns and trends can be readily identified and action initiated.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

73. Support for gifted and talented pupils was not previously inspected. It has been relatively slow to develop and is unsatisfactory. Attainment of more able pupils was identified as a specific priority in the first Education Development Plan. This objective is now built within the national priorities of the new plan. Attainment at the higher levels in Key Stages 1 and 2 is above that nationally and in similar authorities. At Key Stage 3, attainment at the higher levels is above that nationally, but below that in similar authorities in English and mathematics.

74. In the absence of LEA guidance to schools on agreed criteria for the identification of gifted and talented pupils, individual schools have developed their own approaches. As a result, development lacks coherence and pupils' progression is hindered. Two thirds of primary schools and all secondary schools have a policy for gifted and talented pupils approved by governing bodies, but these policies are not based on any common principles or guidance developed with the LEA. The absence of pupil level data within the LEA means that a register of such pupils is not held and accurate tracking of progress of these pupils cannot be achieved.

75. A primary headteacher has provided a helpful point of reference and advice to schools and the gifted and talented theme has been identified as one of the strengths of a Beacon school. A summer school held in 2001 provided little benefit because there was little support work in schools during the following term. There are examples of good practice, but these are not routinely disseminated between schools. The LEA recognizes that support for gifted and talented pupils requires a more co-ordinated approach and this work has been included within the revised brief of the consultant for continuous professional development from September 2003.

*Recommendations***In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:**

- agree with schools the essential components of a policy for gifted and talented pupils, including criteria for the identification of such pupils, and provide an exemplar policy to assist governing bodies;
- compile a new data register of gifted and talented pupils and use this to track the pupils' progress.

Support for governors

76. Support for governors was found to be good at the last inspection. It remains good; the service has continued to improve, particularly since the secondment of a full-time co-ordinator for governor services last year. Support is provided centrally and there is no service level agreement for buying it back. However, it is not an expensive service and is further enhanced by additional packages which the LEA has been able to negotiate at favourable rates for schools from other external providers. The percentage of unfilled vacancies for LEA-nominated governors is below both statistical neighbours and the national average. Governors in the main perform their role well and they are well served by the support provided.

77. The LEA regularly monitors governing body meetings through scrutiny of minutes and uses an improved database to track governors' vacancies and turnover. The LEA actively recruits governors through a range of mechanisms, including open days and local libraries. New chairs of governors have access to experienced mentors. The LEA also has a bank of experienced governors who are prepared to serve on governing bodies of schools causing concern.

78. In two schools causing concern, the LEA has used powers to appoint additional governors. More typically, if weaknesses in governance are identified, support is offered to chairs and additional support is co-ordinated through the core review group. Support is gradually withdrawn as competence improves.

79. LEA support is helpful and accessible, anticipates governors' difficulties and responds rapidly to governors' problems. Support and training programmes are highly relevant and responsive to the needs of individual governors and governing bodies. The quality of training is monitored and action taken to remedy weaknesses. A comprehensive governors' guide provides additional support. Governors are provided with relevant benchmarked information about school performance and useful guidance is given on how governors should use this data.

80. Regular meetings are arranged for specific groups of governors. Communication otherwise is kept to an essential minimum and closely targeted. Work has begun with a number of schools to encourage governing bodies to carry out their own self-reviews and it is

intended that all schools will have completed this activity by July 2004. Relations between the LEA and the local Governors' Forum have been strained until recently, but strategies are now in place for greater sharing of expertise and collaborative working.

Support for school management

81. Support for school management was unsatisfactory at the last inspection. It has improved and is now satisfactory. The audit for the Education Development Plan showed that 39 per cent of schools required some improvement in leadership and management. Consequently, a local priority to improve the quality of leadership, management and governance is included in the plan.

82. Given the relatively high incidence of poor leadership and management in schools causing concern, the LEA has promoted Headfirst⁷ training, offering a funding subsidy to participating headteachers. This training has been received positively and is already having an effect in some schools. The LEA has also begun a three year programme to promote continuous school improvement in its schools, using external consultants.

83. The LEA promotes the full range of national programmes for senior and middle management training, and actively supports Investors in People accreditation with a target to have all schools accredited by 2005. Newly appointed headteachers are also well supported and have access to mentoring.

84. The school effectiveness team offers a relatively ambitious programme of training from within the team. While the support is positive, the potential effect of such work on the time and effectiveness of a small team is significant. There is also a high rate of course cancellations.

85. A range of consultants have recently been interviewed for their suitability in providing additional support to schools from September 2003. The new consultant register offers an alternative and complementary method of providing some training and support opportunities directly to schools. Headteachers are supportive of this development.

86. Although the LEA is aware of good practice in its schools, there is currently no systematic method by which this is collected and disseminated. Further development of the LEA's web site, which already contains a range of useful information and provides a weekly bulletin to all schools, should help to address this.

⁷ Headfirst is a programme promoted by the National College for School Leadership for headteachers and deputy headteachers that concentrates on monitoring and evaluating the performance of schools, especially through the analysis and application of data.

Support for early years

87. The LEA's work to develop and raise the attainment of pupils in the early years is satisfactory. This area was not covered in the 1999 inspection, but progress has been satisfactory. Continuity of support through to KS1 is good. The national baseline scheme, for example, is now widely used locally across both the maintained, and non-maintained sectors.

88. The early years development and childcare plan for 2001-2004, properly concentrated on providing sufficient places to meet parental aspirations. More recently, there has been a greater emphasis on quality issues, such as offering training for childcare providers and accrediting provision through a quality assurance scheme.

89. The LEA has not made the best use of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) in developing its strategic thinking. There has also been a lack of clarity over whether the role of the partnership is advisory, consultative or executive. On at least two occasions the council has made substantive decisions on early years matters without consulting the partnership. Such instances have weakened the partnership's role. The LEA has taken steps to help the partnership by broadening its membership as well as simplifying and consolidating its sub-groups and decision-making processes. These arrangements offer a foundation on which new trust and understanding can be built.

90. In collaboration with the partnership, the LEA has secured a network of area SEN co-ordinators. This reflects the LEA's firm commitment to early identification, and intervention, where a child may have SEN. The LEA and the partnership also offer parents useful information and guidance on early years provision.

Support for 14-19 education

91. Support for 14-19 education was not included in the last inspection. The current position is unsatisfactory. The LEA has had little discussion with the colleges on their relatively narrow Key Stage 4 curriculum and the use of performance data to track the progress of individual students is weak. The council is developing a local public service agreement on 14-19 education, although discussions are at an early stage.

92. The director of education, youth and culture is the main link with the local learning and skills council and has made a good contribution to the development of a joint strategy document that is intended to inform future planning. Two of the community colleges already have specialist status and the LEA is keen to broaden provision through collaboration with post-16 providers, with a view to 90 per cent of local 19 year-olds reaching at least Level 2 qualifications by 2010.

93. Results at Key Stage 4 have improved over the last three years and the staying-on rate post-16 is well above the national average, at over 90 per cent. A small number of Year 10 pupils from the three community colleges are attending vocational courses, as part of the DfES Increasing Flexibility Programme. Local opportunities for young people to gain access work-based training are very limited. As a major employer in the area, the council has an opportunity to help address this issue. So far, however, it has not been pro-active in doing

so. The LEA has also made little progress in building the development of key skills into its social inclusion agenda.

Recommendations

In order to improve the support for 14-19 education:

- in collaboration with local partners, broaden the range of opportunities for young people to achieve at least a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19; and
- expand the ways in which the council, as an employer, provides opportunities for young people to gain access to work-based training and accreditation.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

94. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's management services to schools were satisfactory. There has been further progress, particularly in the provision of personnel support and the overall effectiveness of the services is now highly satisfactory.

95. To secure services that best meet the needs of the schools, the LEA acts as a broker rather than a direct provider of services, so consequently schools obtain support from a range of different sources. The LEA annually monitors schools' satisfaction with the quality of service provided and acts in support of schools if issues arise. There is, however, no comprehensive documentation outlining the variety, cost and quality of services available, to assist schools in making choices. This is a weakness.

96. The **financial service** was good at the time of the last inspection and remains so.

97. The **personnel service** was graded as unsatisfactory in the last inspection as it did not respond effectively to the needs of schools. Funding for the service is delegated to schools and an agreement has been brokered by the LEA with an external provider. This service is now highly satisfactory. The service provides effective support to schools, including resolving issues in a timely manner. The LEA has good processes in place to monitor the arrangement, including the annual survey of schools' views. The LEA also meets with the provider on a regular basis to discuss possible future needs.

98. **Property services** remain highly satisfactory. The services have continued to be provided through a service level agreement with the council. Monitoring of health and safety issues relating to these services is carried out and a report to members recently considered security issues for school premises.

99. Support for **ICT administration** was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and still is. The LEA has continued to develop the use of IT to support schools' administration and facilitate the electronic transfer of data to schools.

100. **Cleaning and caretaking** was not inspected previously, but these services are now highly satisfactory. They are fully delegated and the LEA plays no formal role in procuring them. Every school has a premises officer who oversees the activities on the site.

101. **Grounds Maintenance and catering** were highly satisfactory at the last inspection and remain so. A Best Value inspection of the school meals service in 2002 confirmed this view.

Recommendation

In order to improve the clarity about all services available to schools and their costs:

- supply schools with information setting out details of all services that are provided to schools free as a basic service or at a charge, and provide information on alternative service providers and service standards.

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

102. The work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers was not inspected previously. It is satisfactory. While current difficulties in the recruitment of teachers are mainly related to specific specialisms, such as mathematics in the secondary phase, the LEA regards the retention of staff as a more important concern. A local priority has been included in the Education Development Plan on the wellbeing of pupils and teachers. The issue of how to balance the demands of home and working life is also being addressed by the council.

103. The LEA does not receive any external funding to support work in recruitment and retention. A working party of headteachers, officers and members was formed in 2002 and meets twice per year. It has identified the age profile of teaching staff, housing costs and workload as the key factors to be addressed. A recruitment package is being prepared for publication in September 2003. Negotiations have begun with the housing department of the council on the possible use of some housing stock for new teachers. Schools are experiencing increasing problems in obtaining good quality supply staff, which results in difficulties in releasing school staff for training.

104. Newly qualified teachers are well supported through a programme co-ordinated by a consultant in the school effectiveness team. In 2002, all those recruited continued to work in the LEA for a second year.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary

105. The LEA has made a determined effort to pursue an inclusion strategy whereby most pupils with SEN are educated in mainstream schools. Inclusion is widely supported by the schools and is a significant strength of the authority. Although progress was initially slow after the last inspection, the pace of change has accelerated and good progress has been made. The authority gives a high priority to early identification of, and intervention with, pupils who have SEN. Statutory duties are carried out well and formal assessment is conducted in a timely way. The authority has been especially innovative in delegating resources.

Strategy

106. The LEA's strategy for SEN was found satisfactory at the last inspection and remains so. The current LEA policy is unchanged, but a revised policy is in draft form and this has been approved by the authority for consultation. Schools were not involved in developing the policy and its development has taken too long. However, the authority has made progress. The percentage of pupils with statements of special needs educated in mainstream schools has risen from 74 to 84 per cent since the last inspection. This illustrates the LEA's commitment to inclusion.

107. This commitment is reflected in the overall pattern of schools' provision. With no special schools, apart from the special needs nursery, effective provision for most of the continuum of pupils' need is achieved through small increases in school budgets and specialist support in particular schools, including a small autism class and special unit in one of the primary schools and a special learning unit, called an 'enhanced resource base', in one of the community colleges. The particular arrangements for young autistic pupils were established after wide-ranging debate and with the support of other agencies. Recognising the need to extend this provision into the secondary phase, early discussions are taking place with one of the community colleges to ensure that provision with trained staff will be in place when it is needed. Where pupils have specific or complex needs, places are provided outside the authority.

108. The special needs nursery illustrates the LEA's commitment to early identification of special needs and intervention at that early stage. The nursery also operates a small Portage scheme in partnership with the education psychology service. Targets are set for all pupils with SEN and the extent to which each child has met the targets is assessed during annual reviews. The LEA collects data from the reviews on the progress being made by pupils with statements and this allows it to act when necessary, for example, by initiating a statutory re-assessment of the statement. The LEA does not however systematically analyse the data to identify any trends or patterns and this inhibits senior officers and elected members from gaining an overview of the progress being made by these pupils.

109. A Best Value review of the authority's approach to meeting the SEN of pupils was inspected by Ofsted and the Audit Commission in 2001. The inspection reported positively on the quality of both the service and the review.

Statutory obligations

110. The LEA's performance in meeting its statutory duties for pupils with SEN was satisfactory when last inspected. It is now good. The LEA carries out 90 per cent of statutory assessments within the required time-scale, with exceptional cases making very little difference to these figures. This is well above similar authorities and is a significant strength. In the last four years, the number of statements maintained has fallen by over five per cent, reflecting the SEN inclusion policy.

111. The parent partnership service is provided through an agreement with the local Citizens Advice Bureau. The arrangements for this are well thought through and highly useful information is provided for parents. Although the service has only been used by a relatively small number of parents, it has been effective. The LEA properly informs parents of their right to approach the SEN Tribunal but there has only been one such reference during the last five years.

112. The LEA has produced satisfactory guidance for schools on the criteria to be used in deciding whether a formal assessment will be conducted, and for deciding whether a statement will be issued. Just over three-quarters of such referrals lead to a statement. This is in line with other authorities. Once a statement is finalised, for those pupils who remain in a mainstream setting, a sum of money is allocated to the school to enable it to meet the needs of the statement; this is a figure that is determined on a case-by-case basis. Officers have a detailed knowledge of each child and its needs, and are fully aware of the provision being made. Annual reviews are conducted properly and case files show evidence of appropriate action being taken upon the outcomes. The LEA is also effective in brokering support from other agencies where this is needed.

SEN functions to support school improvement

113. The LEA's performance of this function is highly satisfactory. This area was not inspected previously but the LEA has been making satisfactory progress. The criteria used for statutory assessments are fully in line with the SEN Code of Practice. The training provided on introduction of the new code of practice and strategies to raise pupil attainment and has been good.

114. Resources are allocated to schools to promote inclusion. Two examples are the arrangements for behaviour support and the LEA's Skilled Intervention Teacher Project. The first of these sees resources delegated to the three secondary schools to enable them each to secure the services of a teacher, or other staff, to support behaviour management. The Skilled Intervention Teacher Project is an innovative way of improving the skills of all teachers to deal with the SEN of pupils through resourcing a teacher with specialist skills to work within a school, as opposed to a more traditional, centrally managed, SEN support service. For non-statemented pupils, resources are delegated to schools through a fixed sum for each pupil. Further resources are made available to schools experiencing difficulties with one or more pupils, but this is negotiated separately.

Value for money

115. The value for money of the LEA's work with SEN is highly satisfactory. Costs compare favourably with those in other authorities. While there is no suggestion that the emphasis on inclusion is driven by costs, the pattern of provision is cost effective. Elected members, not least through membership of a SEN review panel, are fully supportive of the drive for greater inclusion and have confirmed that resources saved in reducing out-of-county placements will be fed back into enhancing in-county provision. The LEA's planning and monitoring of its SEN budgets is good, expenditure is monitored and budgets are rarely exceeded.

116. The basis for deploying resources is not sufficiently clear. For example, additional resources to support pupils are too often negotiated on an individual case-by-case basis. This is not good practice.

117. The LEA's monitoring of schools' expenditure on SEN also tends to be on an individual pupil-by-pupil basis, reflecting the detailed personal knowledge which officers have of pupils with statements and their needs. While this approach has much to commend it, it does not generate a sufficiently clear analysis of spending overall. This, in turn, is impeding planning and also hampering monitoring by elected members.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary

118. The LEA's commitment to inclusion is evident from its achievement of 84 per cent of pupils with statements of SEN being educated in mainstream schools. However, while there are some successful strategies and a range of projects is used creatively to improve provision for vulnerable pupils, too little attention is paid to ensuring that actions have a demonstrable effect on pupils. In the 'enhanced resource base' at one of the community colleges (see Paragraph 107), effective effort goes into reviewing progress against action taken; an approach which should be adopted more widely.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

119. The LEA's approach to promoting social inclusion was not included in the last inspection. Advances have been made in promoting the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools and the creation of a new post of inclusion officer in 2001 has helped give greater coherence to strategic planning and management of social inclusion initiatives. Support overall is satisfactory.

120. The council is committed to a corporate objective of maximising social inclusion and the LEA has usefully supported secondary schools by funding a specialist behaviour support teacher in each school. The LEA has also assisted primary schools by deploying a part-time specialist teacher, who provides support for pupils at risk of exclusion and co-ordinates the programme of provision for permanently excluded pupils.

121. The Children and Young People's Strategic Plan provides evidence of the authority's unity of purpose in supporting and tracking vulnerable young people and Rutland's selection as a Trailblazer authority (with two other LEAs) will help develop this area further. Efforts to achieve a co-ordinated approach to social inclusion are still developing and there is some evidence that, for example, education and social services are working more closely together and are working in partnership with other agencies, including the youth offending teams. Some useful projects have also been identified to help promote social inclusion. However, the EYDCP is not yet integral to the LEA's social inclusion agenda and this is an important omission.

The supply of school places

122. The planning of school places was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection and remains so. The LEA provides clear and effective leadership and, through the senior officer team, there is a strong emphasis on supporting school improvement. The LEA's small size means that the same officer is responsible for school places, admissions and building projects, linking the activities and developments together effectively.

123. The School Organisation Plan is comprehensive, complies with statutory requirements and makes good links with asset management planning and the strategies for

school improvement. The plan includes an ambitious set of targets and provides a systematic approach to considering future demand and supply of places.

124. Consultation arrangements are generally good and there are constructive relations with the dioceses and other admissions authorities. However, on the most recent area review, schools have not been fully involved, and this is a weakness. The forecasting of places is sound and the ongoing refinement of the methodology should continue to improve estimates of increases in pupil numbers generated by new housing.

125. Since the last inspection primary surplus places have reduced by three per cent to 18 per cent, following a school closure. Given the rural nature of the area and the mobility of pupils from military families, the overall level is not excessive. Although one secondary community college has more than 10 per cent surplus places, overall, secondary surplus places are also within acceptable limits

Asset management

126. Asset management planning was not previously inspected. It is now good. The strong working relationship between the education and property services departments helps to identify common objectives and retains a focus on improving the learning environment by pooling resources. Education staff are members of the corporate asset management group and education has access to the corporate capital resources. Proposals for building projects are firmly linked to school development plans and strategic priorities.

127. Schools have welcomed and understand the LEA's approach, which has developed in collaboration with school representatives, diocesan authorities and property services. The strategy sets out clear criteria and priorities for expenditure, against which school submissions are considered. There is then clear feedback to schools on their bids so they know the priority of planned work.

128. The LEA has a good knowledge of the condition of school buildings and uses this in dialogue with schools to secure the maximum impact of available resources. Co-ordination of resources across the council has been effective and the success of this collaborative approach has been recognized by schools. The New Deal for Schools funding has helped the LEA to tackle the more urgent building issues. Access grant allocations from the DfES have been used by the LEA via a school bidding process to support inclusion by improving both curriculum and physical access, including facilities for pupils with disability. This approach has now been consolidated in a draft accessibility strategy.

Admissions

129. Admissions arrangements were found to be highly satisfactory by the previous inspection. They remain so. Over the last five years there have been very few cases of parental preferences not being met. Where parents have submitted appeals, these have been dealt with in a timely manner. All three secondary colleges are foundation schools and two of these buy into the LEA admissions support service.

130. During 2002, the Admissions Forum undertook a complete review of primary admission policy, resulting for the first time in a compilation of information on all schools. From September 2004 the LEA will, in line with latest legislation, use a common admissions form and timetable in all primary schools and parents will be able to express a preference for up to three schools. There has been consultation on the proposed changes and this is a positive step forward. However, how details of the new procedures will be communicated effectively to all parents is currently unclear, and this is a weakness.

131. With a widely scattered pupil population, home-to-school transport is an important issue for the LEA. It reviews the transport situation annually to check effectiveness and efficiency, but costs are almost twice the average for unitary authorities at £227 per pupil.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

132. The authority's provision for pupils with no school place is unsatisfactory. Provision was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection in 1999 and the LEA's self evaluation indicated that this remained the case. As a consequence, no detailed fieldwork was to be carried out. However, during the course of the inspection some weaknesses were found.

133. In the last year, although only six pupils were permanently excluded, four of these spent an extended period of time out of school without alternative registered provision. They were only re-entered onto the roll of a school shortly prior to the inspection. The four pupils had individual programmes made up of opportunities to follow a number of GCSE courses, work experience, individual tuition and other activities. However, for one of these pupils, until very recently, these programmes did not comprise the required minimum of 25 hours per week provision. These instances demonstrate serious weaknesses in the authority's procedures.

Recommendations

In order to provide full-time education for all pupils:

- agree a policy covering the maximum acceptable period that a pupil may be off the roll of a school; and
- implement the statutory requirement that all pupils not on the roll of a school receive a minimum of 25 hours per week of structured provision.

Attendance

134. The LEA's support for school attendance was good at the time of the last inspection and this remains the case. Progress has been satisfactory.

135. There is clear guidance on managing attendance and a reasonable range of strategies is in place to monitor poor attendance. No prosecutions were brought for poor attendance during 2001/02, although three have been prepared during 2002/03.

136. The LEA has appropriately broadened the remit of the post of Education Welfare Officer, redesignating it as the School Inclusion Development Officer. Targets for attendance are set at an individual pupil level and actual attendance is monitored against these. A draft attendance policy has been considered by the cabinet, prior to consultation with schools and key stakeholders. The policy endorses the current arrangements. It also outlines the responsibility of the LEA and schools, making particular reference to targeting vulnerable groups.

Behaviour support

137. The LEA's support for behaviour was highly satisfactory at the last inspection. No detailed fieldwork was conducted in this area, although following the LEA's request for it to be included in the inspection, some evidence was collected while other areas were being explored. The evidence collected confirms that the quality of support has been maintained. Permanent exclusions are low and the behaviour support teachers are providing effective support.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

138. The LEA's arrangements for this function are good; this area was not inspected in 1999 but progress in recent years has been highly satisfactory.

139. The LEA fully meets its statutory duties with regard to child protection. It contributes to the work of the Area Child Protection Committee and plays an active role in protecting children from significant harm. All schools have a designated teacher for child protection matters and the list of these is up-dated termly. The authority delivers whole-school training and participates in planning and delivering a training programme for designated teachers through multi-agency co-operation. The LEA also monitors the take-up of training and has recently identified two schools where the designated person has not yet been appropriately trained. Child protection procedures have been circulated to all schools and these contain clear procedures, guidance and referral routes where there may be concern. When schools have needed to make referrals to Social Services, they have received helpful and prompt advice and, where necessary, the statutory investigation agencies have acted swiftly and effectively. Links between schools and social workers on child protection issues are also effective.

140. The authority has clear policies for Health and Safety and provides a range of useful information, and guidance, to schools on safety matters.

Looked after children

141. The authority's arrangements for meeting the needs of looked after children were not previously inspected. They are unsatisfactory. The LEA does not routinely report the children's educational attainment and progress to elected members. This is a significant weakness.

142. There are only 13 looked after children and three of these are below school age. Of the other 10 children, six are educated outside the authority. The LEA routinely collects data

on the attainment of those children educated within the authority but does not, in all cases, have up-to-date data on those educated outside. In other respects, the authority has taken its duties as corporate parent of these children seriously.

143. Both the Children's Services Plan and the Quality Protects Management Action Plan refer to raising the educational attainments of looked after children, as does the EDP, and targets are set for the children. Designated teachers support the children in four schools and the authority has provided advice and multi-agency training on issues involved in raising attainment.

144. There are clear agreements between the education and social services departments on sharing information and joint working to support looked after children. Each directorate is fully aware of, and receives, the information it needs from the other to enable it to carry out its functions efficiently. All looked after children have a Personal Education Plan.

Recommendation

In order to enable elected members to fulfil their roles as corporate parents of looked after children more effectively:

- ensure that they receive regular reports on the educational attainments of these children.

Measures to combat racism

145. The LEA's work to combat racism is poor. This area was not previously inspected, but it is clear that the LEA has made slow progress and is significantly behind the achievements of many other authorities. Although the LEA has devised policies and procedures designed to raise awareness of racism, it has not made work in this area a high priority.

146. The council received a report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence in 2000. While elected members accepted the recommendations in the report, no procedures were put in place for monitoring racist incidents in schools, nor reporting these to the council. These were significant omissions. The authority has also chosen to expand the remit for a racial equality scheme to cover disability and gender. However, the document is still in draft form and its delay is unacceptable. The authority has committed itself to the equality standard for local government and is working to achieve Level 1 during 2003.

147. The authority has run basic training on preventing racism and there has been some work on developing materials for curriculum use, particularly through the vehicle of religious education and with the support of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that the authority discharges its statutory duty to protect pupils and prepares them for an adult life in a multi-cultural society :

- implement a system for recording, reporting and analysing any racist incidents in schools and making regular summary reports on these to elected members; and
 - publish a race equality scheme without further delay.
-

Section 5: Corporate issues

Summary

148. Rutland is a small authority which nevertheless is required to carry out the same key functions as much larger ones. To be at its most effective, it must be clear and efficient in determining its priorities and focusing its efforts. As yet, the LEA has not been totally successful in getting the balance in these areas right. The result is that the relatively small number of elected members and senior officers are sometimes expending energy inefficiently and not being as productive as they might be. With a somewhat sharper focus on school improvement priorities, progress has recently accelerated. It is vital that this momentum is sustained.

Corporate planning

149. Corporate planning was found to be satisfactory at the last inspection. Since then, the recommendation to raise the status of the director of education has been addressed and the quality of LEA plans and planning remains satisfactory. Education is the top priority of the council; this has been confirmed by the new council leader, following the recent local elections.

150. The council employs common planning formats across all directorates, and plans are mostly affordable and achievable. There is an effective corporate planning cycle and this is monitored by the corporate management team. Corporate plans such as the asset management plan and the implementing electronic government statement are of good quality. The LEA strategic plan and all service plans reflect the corporate aims and objectives and show clear lines of responsibility. Cross-departmental planning is still developing and there remain examples of compartmentalisation and co-ordination that have yet to be addressed. Progress of plans is reviewed, but the monitoring of their impact is not consistently focused on key indicators nor effectively measured.

151. The Best Value Performance Plan has been improved year-on-year, but still has some weaknesses. It is a weighty document and is somewhat repetitive. The plan's objectives lack focus, some timescales for improvement are too long and some performance indicators are either missing or imprecise. The LEA understands these shortcomings and is taking steps to address them.

Decision making

152. Council decision making was satisfactory at the last inspection and it remains so. The forward plan helps to ensure that decisions required are identified well in advance. The corporate management team reviews the plan every month, so that issues are addressed in a timely way.

153. The council has shown itself willing to take difficult decisions, for example, in closing one school and establishing joint management of two others under one headteacher. As a small authority, the council faces a continuing challenge to maintain a sufficiently viable

central capability to support schools. While the council has been creative in ensuring that key support functions are carried out, communication with schools on the reasons for retaining control of some items of expenditure is not consistently explicit.

154. The LEA's self-evaluation for the inspection was accurate in many respects and sound overall. However, in several key areas, the progress made by the LEA since the previous inspection is less than the LEA's assessment would suggest.

The leadership provided by officers and elected members

155. The leadership of senior officers was found to be satisfactory at the last inspection and remains so. The leadership provided by elected members and the support they receive were not inspected previously, but are also satisfactory.

156. Education has been the top priority of the council during every year but one since the previous inspection. Members fulfil a suitable strategic role and there is effective delegation to officers. All plans and policies are presented to the cabinet for discussion and approval and are then formally approved by the full council. The education portfolio holder meets with the director of education, youth and culture weekly and with other senior officers, as required.

157. Elected members are under pressure to carry out the full range of corporate functions despite the small size of the authority. Partly for this reason, corporate decisions are not consistently evaluated for their effect on improving service quality. Working groups of members are involved in monitoring and reviewing plans, such as the education development plan. The education, youth and culture scrutiny panel also took a strong lead on the review of the school meals contract, which the cabinet accepted. However, the panel has not yet focused on standards achieved by schools and pupils, and has not given attention to the effect that council decisions have on these.

158. The small senior education team has a broad span of responsibility and has not found it easy to separate its strategic role from tackling operational issues. One result has been that decisions on whether various functions should be carried out by the LEA or delegated to schools have not been explained sufficiently clearly. Senior officers have a strong commitment to school improvement and support is now better targeted than at the previous inspection. The officers have high expectations of schools and each other and respond creatively to new initiatives in trying to secure new ways of supporting schools and pupils. Not all schools have welcomed being challenged by the LEA and efforts to help schools improve their capacity to evaluate themselves have not yet been totally effective. Some recent lessons in conveying difficult messages have been learnt and this should help build further capacity to support the schools in the future.

159. The quality and range of monitoring information provided for elected members mostly ensures that decision-making is timely and effective. Senior officers attend the scrutiny panels in order to ensure that information discussed is correct and members are well informed on national and local initiatives. Communication between members and officers by electronic mail helps to ensure efficient responses to individual queries. All members receive a weekly directorate bulletin and there is regular contact with ward members about issues in

their local schools. Currently, however, these communications do not focus sufficiently on standards and progress issues.

160. A recurring theme during the inspection was that the LEA is not consistently transparent when discussing its plans. The LEA has often delayed consulting schools on issues, with the result that headteachers and governors feel that their views are under-valued. This has impeded the development of a real sense of partnership with the schools. The lack of involvement of schools in developing the new draft SEN strategy and the failure to explain the functions and decisions of the core review group in assessing schools' effectiveness, both illustrate this point. In such a small authority, personal contact between members or officers and schools is relatively easy and this is a strength. Senior officers meet termly with headteachers and chairs of governors and also contribute to many partnerships, such as the networks for headteachers and governors. These formal structures are, however, often by-passed and relations with schools tend to be too informal. These arrangements do not stand up well to close scrutiny and the challenge of accountability required.

Recommendations

In order to improve the leadership of elected members:

- focus the work of the scrutiny panel on pupils' and schools' standards and on the effects that council decisions have on these.

In order to improve the leadership of senior officers:

- give greater priority to strategic functions, including clarifying with schools in a three-year plan which key tasks should be carried out directly by the LEA.

In order to improve relations with schools:

- develop the arrangements for working with schools, so that these are more transparent, rely less on informality and have clearer lines of accountability.

Partnership

161. Partnership⁸ with other agencies was found to be satisfactory at the last inspection and, overall, it remains so. The LEA has added to its range of partnerships and embedded many of these within the overall corporate strategy and in its approach to school improvement. However, while many of these developments are positive, some important opportunities to establish joint working at the heart of the authority's work, particularly with schools, have been missed. The recent corporate assessment report⁹ stated that "the council has taken significant steps to improve its capacity which includes making extensive use of partnerships". However, the sense of 'partnership' with schools lacks openness and the purpose of specific partnerships with other agencies, whether advisory, consultative or

⁸ See also under Support for early years and Support for 14 – 19 education in Section 2

⁹ Audit Commission corporate assessment of the council 2002

executive, has not been clarified consistently. Monitoring of the influences of the various partnerships is also uneven.

162. The authority has useful links with several neighbouring local district councils through the Welland Partnership and good working partnerships with the local learning and skills council and the education business partnership. An increasing number of jointly funded posts are helping to ensure a stronger focus on partnership working and these are contributing to school improvement. There are also examples of jointly-funded projects to help schools to gain access to additional funding.

163. The local strategic partnership is currently involved in drafting the community plan, prior to wider consultation. While the authority is behind many others in this task, it is on course to meet the government's deadline and the route chosen has enabled community involvement to be maximised.

164. The Children and Young Peoples' strategic partnership is chaired by the chief executive and includes an elected member and a parental representative. It has set up a number of thematic groups and one of these, the strategic youth partnership is effective in bringing together social services, education, the drugs advisory team, the local health trust, parents, the police, Connexions and the youth offenders' team. However, in the case of some of these groups, the effectiveness is not easily measurable nor sufficiently explicit.

165. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership has not yet been used effectively by the authority as a vehicle for joined-up working. Rather than being integral to the council's strategic planning, it has been somewhat marginalised. The opportunity to develop the partnership to help the council to secure an integrated approach to early years, involving social services and health agencies, has not been taken up. The relatively low number of needy cases does not encourage joint working, but nevertheless opportunities for collaboration are being missed.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of local partnerships:

- develop indicators to review the effects of various links with partners on pupils' achievement and progress so that this may be shared with elected members, schools and the partners themselves; and
- involve the EYDCP more closely in further developing the corporate inclusion agenda..

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 provide full-time education for all pupils:

- agree a policy covering the maximum acceptable period that a pupil may be off the roll of a school;
- implement the statutory requirement that all pupils not on the roll of a school receive a minimum of 25 hours per week of structured provision.

In order to enable elected members to fulfil their roles as corporate parents of looked after children more effectively:

- ensure that they receive regular reports on the educational attainments of these children.

In order to ensure that the authority discharges its statutory duty to protect pupils and prepares them for an adult life in a multi-cultural society:

- implement a system for recording, reporting and analysing any racist incidents in schools and making regular summary reports on these to elected members;
- publish a race equality scheme without further delay.

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

In order to increase the transparency and understanding of the priorities for budget setting:

- consult schools fully on budget priorities, the timetable for budget planning and the central retention of national grants.

In order to improve the effectiveness of services to support school improvement:

- clarify the sources of current and future funding, to ensure that continuity of support is maintained as funding sources change.

In order to strengthen the strategy for monitoring, challenge and intervention:

- reduce the number of grades used in the monitoring, challenge and support strategy;
 - identify the triggers for inclusion clearly in each of the categories;
 - publish all component parts of the strategy for supporting schools in a single document for headteachers and their government bodies;
-

-
- incorporate schools' self-evaluation in the review process and use the results as the basis of an agreement for action and support with the schools.

In order to focus resources upon greatest need:

- implement the differentiated scheme of support and negotiate with schools methods of providing additional support to schools, either from LEA staff or from brokered services, through a costed agreement.

In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenging schools:

- provide early notice to schools about how the work on challenging and supporting target setting and development planning is to be provided from September 2003;
- implement a system for data collection and analysis at individual pupil level and consult schools on the additional data required at school level to analyse the performances of specific groups and cohorts.

In order to improve the clarity about all services available to schools and their costs:

- supply schools with information setting out details of all services that are provided to schools free as a basic service or at a charge, and provide information on alternative service providers and service standards.

In order to improve the leadership of elected members:

- focus the work of the scrutiny panel on pupils' and schools' standards and on the effects that council decisions have on these.

In order to improve the leadership of senior officers:

- give greater priority to strategic functions, including clarifying with schools in a three-year plan which key tasks should be carried out directly by the LEA.

In order to improve relations with schools:

- develop the arrangements for working with schools, so that these are more transparent, rely less on informality and have clearer lines of accountability.

The report also makes the following recommendations:

In order to improve the support for minority ethnic pupils:

- collect, analyse and routinely report to senior officers and members data on the attainment of such pupils, so that any patterns and trends can be readily identified and action initiated.
-

In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- agree with schools the essential components of a policy for gifted and talented pupils, including criteria for the identification of such pupils, and provide an exemplar policy to assist governing bodies;
- compile a new data register of gifted and talented pupils and use this to track the pupils' progress.

In order to improve the support for 14-19 education:

- in collaboration with local partners, broaden the range of opportunities for young people to achieve at least a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19;
- expand the ways in which the council, as an employer, provides opportunities for young people to gain access to work-based training and accreditation.

In order to improve the effectiveness of local partnerships:

- develop indicators to review the effects of various links with partners on pupils' achievement and progress so that this may be shared with elected members, schools and the partners themselves;
- involve the EYDCP more closely in further developing the corporate inclusion agenda.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

Name of LEA :	Rutland
LEA number:	382
Name of Inspector:	Vic Chivers
Date of Inspection:	May 03

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	5	
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	4	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	4	
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	5	
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	4	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	3	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	3	NI
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	3	NI

14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	3	NI
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	4	
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	5	
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	
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	3	
20a	Financial services	2	NI
20b	Human resources	3	
20c	Property services	3	NI
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	3	NI
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	3	
20f	Grounds maintenance	3	NI
20g	Catering	3	NI
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	3	NI
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	4	NI
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	4	NI
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	3	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	4	NI
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	4	NI
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	4	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	2	
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	3	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	4	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	3	
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	2	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	
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	5	NI
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	2	NI
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	3	NI
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	2	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	5	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	6	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	4	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	4	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	4	

46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	4	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	4	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	4	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	4	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	5	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	4	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	4	

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- Grade 1 – Very good
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools