**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION**

# INSPECTION OF

# NORTH YORKSHIRE

# LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

June 2000

**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS**
**in conjunction with the**
**AUDIT COMMISSION**

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**INTRODUCTION**

1.    This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997.  The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2.    The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the education and library services department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners.  In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 388 schools.  The response rate was 84 per cent.

3.    The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 23 mainstream schools and three special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy.  The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

**COMMENTARY**

4.    North Yorkshire LEA serves a relatively prosperous population, although there are areas where measures of deprivation such as the proportion of unemployed adults are at or above national averages.  The size and population distribution within the LEA are such that there are significant numbers of small schools, many of which are church schools.  There is also a wide variety of types of school within this LEA, including a range of two-tier and three-tier systems, as well as comprehensive and, in two areas, selective schools.  There is then a greater diversity of provision than in most LEAs.

5.    Overall, the schools in North Yorkshire perform very well.  The standard of attainment achieved by pupils as demonstrated by external test results is, in the main, above or well above national averages across the full age range, and attainment mostly exceeds that of LEAs with similar socio-economic circumstances.  OFSTED inspections show that the quality of education provided by North Yorkshire schools is a positive feature.  The proportion of schools judged to be good or very good is higher than that nationally and for similar LEAs.  Significantly, no schools are subject to special measures and the few with serious weaknesses are generally making good progress.  Attendance is above the national average and exclusions are lower than the national average.

6.    Some, if not most, of this success could be attributed to factors such as the pride and high expectations parents and teachers have in their schools.  The findings of this inspection show, however, that the LEA makes a clear contribution to this success through a combination of efficient support, judicious but effective intervention and, where appropriate, a sensible hands-off approach.  This is not to say that the LEA has got it exactly right or that it could not do better.  There is more the LEA can and should do in relation to the weaknesses identified in paragraph 9 below.

7.    The LEA has, however, got much right.  It retains relatively little of the budget for central services; delegating a higher proportion than most to schools and promoting greater autonomy.  It gives a clear strategic steer in terms of school improvement and provides good, cost-effective support from most of its services.  Relationships between officers, Council members and schools are very good and there is much confidence and mutual respect between senior officers and headteachers.  Significantly, North Yorkshire LEA is successfully carrying out its functions to promote higher standards in an area where attainment is already better than average.

8.    The following functions are discharged effectively or, more often, highly effectively:

- clear strategic leadership which encompasses the significant diversity of schools;
- support for school autonomy through high delegation of budget share;
- challenge to poorly performing schools and support for weak schools;
- support for school management and provision of good quality services, such as finance, personnel, admissions, property maintenance and behaviour support;

- promotion of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies;
- promotion of support for child protection issues;
- support to improve attendance;
- development of early years provision.

9.    The following aspects are unsatisfactory, at least in part, and require some improvement:

- coherence of policies and support for Information and Communication Technology;
- quality and timeliness of statements of special educational needs;
- transparency of criteria for schools causing concern;
- arrangements for consultation and communication with governors;
- involvement of schools at an early stage in the budget strategy;
- support for pupils from ethnic minorities;
- challenge to schools where standards are already well above national averages.

10.    For the most part the LEA is aware of these weaknesses and is already taking steps to address them.  There is a clear resolve at all levels in the LEA, including members, to strive to achieve excellence in all that it does.  The weaknesses identified above represent a challenge to do better for an LEA that is, on most measures, already doing very well.  This report shows there is more to do but the view of the inspection team is that North Yorkshire LEA has the potential and the capacity to improve further.

**SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

**Context**

11.  North Yorkshire LEA serves a large geographical area with a growing but dispersed population.  Over 97 per cent of the county is defined as "sparse" or "very sparse" and almost half of the population live in 3 per cent of the land area.  The school age population of North Yorkshire is approximately 85,400 and is expected to rise to 86,189 by January 2001.  Pupils are accommodated in 389 schools comprising:

| | |
|---|---|
| Nursery schools | 3 |
| Nursery classes (attached to primary schools) | 56 |
| Primary | 328 |
| Middle | 5 |
| Secondary 11-16 | 18 |
| Secondary 11-18 | 21 |
| Secondary 13/14-18 | 3 |
| Special | 11 |

12.  The pattern of types and sizes of schools is more diverse than in most LEAs.  Over half (52 per cent) of the primary schools are voluntary schools and nearly half of all primary schools (47 per cent) have fewer than 90 pupils.  In the secondary sector 17 per cent of schools are voluntary schools and nearly half (23/47) of all secondary schools have fewer than 700 on roll (seven have fewer than 400).  These figures reflect the often rural nature of the area.

13.  Transfer to secondary schools in most areas is at 11+, except in North Craven, where pupils transfer to middle school at 10+ and to high school at 14+.  Northallerton and Whitby have middle schools for pupils from 11-14 years, and high schools for pupils from 14-18.  Secondary schools are comprehensive except in the Ripon and Skipton areas where there is a selective system.  Schools in the Scarborough and Selby areas are organised on the basis of 11-16 schools with post-16 provision in local colleges.

14.  The LEA serves a relatively advantaged population.  The proportion of adults with higher education qualifications is in line with the national average but there is an above average number of adults from social classes one and two.  The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average and in line with similar LEAs, as are the figures for pupils in special schools.  The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below average for the country as a whole and below that for similar LEAs.  The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is below the national average but in line with similar LEAs.  The unemployment rate of 3.5 per cent is lower than the national average of 4.9 per cent but with significant local variations.  In the Scarborough area, for example, unemployment is higher than the national average.

**Performance**

15.   Overall standards achieved in North Yorkshire schools exceed both national averages and those of similar local authorities across the full age range.  The quality of education provided by North Yorkshire schools, as demonstrated in OFSTED inspections, also compares favourably with most other LEAs.

16.   Baseline assessments of pupils on entry to schools have been rising over the past three years, in part at least as a result of work done to support nurseries and pre-school playgroups.  At the end of Key Stage 1 standards in English and mathematics are higher than the national average and than the average for LEAs with similar characteristics.  By the end of Key Stage 2, standards in English, mathematics and science are well above the national average and that for similar LEAs.  The overall rate of improvement in core subjects since 1996 has been similar to the national average and that of statistical neighbour authorities, even though starting at a higher point.

17.   Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science continues to be well above the national average and that of similar LEAs.  There has been improvement in each of these subjects but it has been particularly marked in English.  Performance at GCSE has been consistently above the national average and that of similar LEAs.  Last year 56.8 per cent of the age group achieved five or more Grades A*-C, compared with a national figure of 47.8 per cent.  The average points score was 41.9 compared with 38.  Again, there has been steady improvement from year to year.  A similar picture emerges at A-level and in other examinations taken in the 16-19 age range.

18.   School inspection reports indicate no significant differences between the achievement of the small proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups and that of the majority.  Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and attain at appropriate levels.

19.   Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is above the national average and is also above that in similar LEAs.  The rate of unauthorised absence is lower than nationally, and very close to that in similar LEAs.  The proportion of primary school pupils who have been excluded has been constant over recent years at 0.1 per cent and is lower than that nationally (0.4 per cent) and in similar LEAs (0.3 per cent).  The proportion of permanently excluded secondary pupils is also lower than the national average.  It rose by a small amount from 1996 to 1997, but has now levelled out.

20.   OFSTED inspection evidence shows that the proportion of good or very good primary schools is higher in North Yorkshire than in the country as a whole and than in similar LEAs.  None have been found to require substantial improvement.  For secondary schools, the picture is even more positive.  More than 90 per cent of the schools inspected were judged to be good or very good in overall terms, with again none needing major improvement.

**Funding**

21.   The Standard Spending Assessment  (SSA) resource available to the local authority is 94 per cent of the English average but broadly in line with the average for its statistical neighbours in both primary and secondary phases.  However, North Yorkshire County Council spends in excess of its SSA on education and increases in the SSA have been fully passed on to the education service budget.

| (£m) | 1996/97 | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 | 2000/01 | Period Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **EDUCATION SSA** | 185.9 | 187.9 | 206.7 | 219.7 | 232.2 | 1,032.4 |
| **Expenditure (Budget 1999/00 and 2000/2001)** | 196.3 | 196.6 | 215.1 | 228.3 | 240.9 | 1,077.2 |
| **Spend above SSA** | 10.4 | 8.7 | 8.4 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 44.8 |
| **Budget as % of SSA** | 105.6% | 104.6% | 104.1% | 103.9% | 103.7% | 104.3% |

22.   North Yorkshire schools are funded at a higher level compared to the average for shire counties and similar authorities (statistical neighbours).  This is illustrated in the table below.  Individual school budget (ISB) shares and local school budget (LSB) shares per pupil exceed the averages for counties and statistical neighbours. The LEA has been effective at limiting central costs; enabling higher levels of delegation than the averages for other counties and statistical neighbours.  The LEA intends to meet the Secretary of State's delegation targets for 2000/2001.

| | Primary ISB per pupil (£) | Secondary ISB per pupil (£) | Expenditure per pupil (£) | LSB not delegated (%) | Central spend on statutory duties per pupil (£) | Retained SEN spend per pupil (£) | EDP spend per pupil (£) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LEA | 1615 | 2424 | 2470 | 17.25 | 42 | 132 | 19 |
| Shire Counties | 1609 | 2314 | 2447 | 18.43 | 47 | 146 | 19 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 1586 | 2302 | 2446 | 19.95 | 48 | 153 | 21 |

23.   Few schools have deficit balances and where these occur they are acceptably small and controlled.   Two exceptions to this were special schools, which accumulated large deficits at the end of 1998/99 as a result of the underfunding of residential provision.  The LEA has made adjustments to these budgets and the deficits are forecast to be removed by the end of the financial year 1999/2000. Conversely, over two-thirds of primary schools and over half of secondary and special schools have balances in excess of 5 per cent.  This has given rise to a substantial overall balance on school budgets of £12.30 million in 1998/99.

24.   The combined per pupil North Yorkshire cost of financing severance and premature retirement costs (£21) is below county (£26), England (£27) and statistical neighbours' (£26) averages.  However, new commitments at £12 per pupil were around twice the level of the other averages in 1999/2000.  This has involved the establishment of a central fund to support a severance scheme, which is forecast to have a substantial balance (£1.98m) by the end of 1999/2000.

25.   Home to school transport costs in North Yorkshire (£114 per pupil) are above the county (£93) and England averages (£63) but they are slightly lower than the average for statistical neighbours (£120).

**Council Structure**

26.   The County Council comprises 74 elected members.  It has five committees including the education and library services committee.  The latter consists of 25 County Councillors, three Church representatives and nine non-voting members. After a substantial period in which no party had an overall majority, one party now has a narrow majority.  The education and library services committee has seven sub-committees plus a teachers' consultative forum.  The monitoring and resources sub-committee has a remit to "recommend targets for and monitor the quality and effectiveness of education and library services" and to "monitor the range and quality of provision in schools".  It is this committee, therefore, which routinely receives reports on the standards and effectiveness of North Yorkshire schools.  Discussions about alternative structures for the council have begun, but there is no consensus on the way forward and no firm decisions have been made.

**The Education Development Plan**

27.   The Education Development Plan (EDP) sets out a purposeful strategy for school improvement and has been approved by the Secretary of State for three years subject to the general conditions which apply to many LEAs.  It sets eight priorities which are appropriate to the LEA and which reflect the national agenda. These are:

- Literacy;
- Numeracy;
- Early Years;
- National Grid for Learning;
- Breadth and Balance;
- Leadership, Management and Governance;
- Special Educational Needs;
- Additional Support.

28.   In the main, the plan is very good.  It is well organised overall and there are suitable connections with other statutory plans.  There are clear targets which are translated into achievable actions.

29.   Monitoring of the plan takes place on a quarterly basis.  The LEA has already completed its first full evaluation of progress against the plan and has produced a draft revised plan in the light of its findings.  The evaluation is an objective

assessment of the LEA's impact, recognising successful progress in many areas. The resultant revisions in the new draft plan will improve further the focus of the LEA's activities.

**The Allocation of Resources to Priorities**

30.    In the main the allocation of resources is well handled through the education budget, and members have recently directed additional resources to areas such as Key Stage 2 which have been identified as policy priorities.  However, schools are not appropriately involved in the strategic planning of the Council's budget and the allocation of resources to education within it.

31.    The LEA has embarked upon an appropriate exercise to update its LMS scheme in line with schools' needs.  It aims to complete the exercise in readiness for 2001/2002 and anticipates that it will identify funding gaps.  Additionally, the local authority has recognised that it needs to have specific regard to post-16 pupil funding pressures.

32.    In many aspects of the provision of support services, delegation and consultation the record of the local authority has been impressive.  North Yorkshire has many years' experience of managing delegated services and has typically offered good quality services at different levels to enable schools to exercise choice according to needs.  It secures a high level of buy back.  Contracts in the main give schools the flexibility of withdrawal subject to six month's notice.

33.    From April 2000 the major areas of new delegation are payroll and structural maintenance.  The latter was technically delegated in April 1999 but in agreement with its schools, and in the absence of a developed scheme for being able to offer a service, the local authority effectively retained all funding in 1999/2000.  All but three schools returned their budget share to the centre to buy back the service.  Schools could have been helped this year by an earlier communication from the local authority of the contract and cost details for these services but this did not happen until the spring term.

34.    Although the local authority provides good traded services, it does not assist schools in selecting other providers as a matter of course and it has not been sufficiently active in assisting schools to apply best value principles.  Schools are now required as part of the LMS scheme to submit with their budget plans a statement of how best value principles are followed, but this has not happened.

**Recommendations**

**In order to ensure that schools are able to plan more effectively and to contribute to the Council's resource deployment strategy:**

- mechanisms should be established to involve schools more fully in the Council's budget planning process, and budget information should be communicated at an early stage to all schools.

**In order to ensure schools apply the principles of best value in the deployment of their budget:**

- schools should be required to submit their statements of intent for review as part of the annual monitoring process.

## SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

**Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention**

35.    The LEA's provision for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention is good overall, with some very good features as well as one or two weaknesses.

36.    The major responsibility for these functions rests with the curriculum and management advisory services (CAMAS) which consist of advisers, advisory teachers, consultants and professional and administrative support staff.  The service is well managed, with clear individual and line management responsibilities identified.  Working practices are appropriately focused on school improvement, linked to the EDP.  The team is generally well balanced with each adviser having link and phase or subject roles.  Support for schools across most curricular areas is available.  The overall quality of this support is generally satisfactory, and often good or better.

37.    The effectiveness of the CAMAS team is primarily assessed through internal team meetings, appraisal and an audit of the work carried out with schools.  Whilst this provides senior managers in CAMAS with a view about the quality of the service provided, the mechanism for establishing the full impact on individual schools is in its infancy.

38.    The strategy for monitoring school performance is generally thorough and includes the analysis of school performance data, OFSTED inspection reports and first hand evidence gathered from advisers' visits to schools.  Advisers' notes of visit are placed in the LEA school files.  However, it has not been established clearly how information from all authority sources will be collated to provide a more detailed information base relating to every school.  All schools have nominated link and "paired" advisers, the latter often providing a phase specialism relevant to the school where the link adviser does not do so.  However, a significant number of those schools visited during the inspection did not know who their paired adviser was or how this person could be used to support the school.

39.    The CAMAS allocate a minimum half-day monitoring visit per term by the link adviser but there is appropriate differentiation to ensure that weaker schools have a greater allocation.  There is an agreed agenda, known in advance, that focuses on EDP priorities linked to the school improvement strategy.  These visits are, in the main, well balanced between LEA and school determined items for discussion.  Most visits also include classroom observations of work arising from national or local initiatives, for example monitoring the impact of the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies, or assessing the quality of provision for special educational needs.  These visits work well in practice, particularly in relation to establishing challenging key stage targets for most schools.  This process is described in greater detail in section ii on the collection and analysis of data below.

40.    All monitoring visits conclude with an oral feedback from the adviser to the headteacher.  This aspect of the visit is valued by headteachers, who generally view the comments made as challenging, but supportive of the work of the school.

Written notes of visits are also sent to the headteacher with a copy for the chair of the governing body, normally (but not always) within ten days of a visit.  Most notes of visits are said by headteachers to reflect accurately the oral feedback, although on some occasions the written note is softened and less punchy than the verbal feedback.  Most notes of visit are appropriately evaluative, but a minority are too descriptive and provide insufficient information for the school to detail future action to address any observed weaknesses.

**Collection and Analysis of Data**

41.   The analysis and provision of data to enable schools to evaluate  their own performance and compare it with both national and LEA performance are well managed overall.  Each autumn, schools receive information that shows LEA and national aggregated data together with the school's own data.  In addition, schools receive a computer disk that contains further  data which enables them to make comparisons with other named schools, within the county for primary schools, and nationally for secondary schools.  Whilst this is useful, the data provided currently is limited to aggregated school data.  The LEA is building up a more sophisticated database at pupil level, but this is not yet complete.  Some headteachers make very effective use of the available performance data but many require additional training to realise its full potential as part of managing improvement in their schools.

42.   A major use of the data by the LEA and schools is for target setting, which is in the main well handled and facilitates a successful means of challenging most schools to improve.  Guidance on how this is done and how schools should set their own targets is clear and well written, and this aspect of the process is understood in most schools.  Training on target setting has been thorough, and most heads know how the LEA calculates its expected targets for individual schools.

43.   The calculation of the projected target range for each school is based on the performance of the cohort in its most recent key stage test, together with a built-in expectation of improvement in performance, or "challenge".  Schools which set targets below the lower limit of the range suggested by the LEA are challenged either to produce evidence to justify their target, or to adjust the target to meet the indicated range.  This process was used effectively in 1999, when 80 primary and 12 secondary schools were challenged in this way.  Of these, about two-thirds changed their targets to align with LEA expectations, and the others were able to convince the LEA about the validity of the original targets by providing additional data.  In many cases, the reason for the difference between the LEA's predicted range and the school's own targets resulted from pupil movement between schools.  This difficulty should be resolved when the LEA and schools can work from individual pupil data.

44.   The LEA is aware of the need to identify and challenge schools which, in spite of apparently good results, may not be extending their pupils as much as they could. This is particularly important in an area where schools generally perform above national averages.  However, the LEA recognises that it has not found the complete answer to this for the highest attaining schools.  Setting targets on the basis of prior attainment goes some but not all of the way.  The three selective secondary schools are being encouraged to set additional targets in more appropriate measures and at higher levels, and work is also in hand to develop appropriate benchmarks for target

setting for special schools.  Nevertheless, there is evidence of a small minority of the more highly performing schools setting "safe" attainment targets which do not reflect appropriately high expectations of their pupils.

**Support for Literacy**

45.  Support for literacy in North Yorkshire is good.  Developments are well supported through the management of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in primary schools and by an appropriate extension of work by the literacy team with secondary schools.  The LEA has set targets that, by 2002, 87 per cent of pupils will attain level 4 or better in English at the end of Key Stage 2, and 65 per cent will achieve a Grade C or better in GCSE English.  These are ambitious targets, but the current levels of attainment and the improving trend of recent years suggest that they are attainable.

46.  The two cohorts of schools identified by the LEA for intensive support in the implementation of NLS are appropriate, although the criteria for schools in the second cohort are not sufficiently transparent to all headteachers.  The help for schools receiving intensive support ranges is never less than satisfactory.  No special schools are included in the intensive support group, but all have had access to the initial training and can take part in literacy co-ordinators' meetings alongside colleagues in mainstream schools.

47.  Standards in English at the end of Key Stage 2 have shown an improvement between 1998 and 1999 of about 5 per cent.  This is very close to the national improvement average.  However, the North Yorkshire baseline was higher than the national average, so the improvement made represents a substantial achievement.  Significantly, in schools that have been receiving intensive support, the improvement was even more substantial at 17 per cent.

48.  The central team of advisers keeps a register of good practice in relation to literacy, and co-ordinators in schools are generally well supported.  The LEA has issued helpful guidance on planning of work with mixed age classes and on literacy work in reception classes.  This is important in an LEA with so many small schools.  Nevertheless some smaller schools that are not receiving intensive support are critical that they have been left too much on their own in the early stages of implementing NLS.

49.  All schools receive monitoring visits from advisers, and these are effective in promoting internal evaluation and improvement, but further work is needed to ensure a common evaluative base for both monitoring and to secure improved standardisation of judgement.  Recently, pupil support assistants have been trained in the use of advanced literacy strategy materials to help individual and small groups of lower attaining pupils, and the impact on the schools is good.

50.  In some parts of the authority, beneficial working links have been established with the community education service to provide family literacy schemes to engage children and parents in reading and other literacy activities.  This is a valuable extension of the literacy work taking place in the schools.

51. Conferences were organised in summer 1999 to help secondary school teachers understand the changes introduced by the NLS into primary schools and to consider its implications for secondary work. These gave added impetus to work in progress in some schools, which have already modified their English schemes of work to reflect the approaches of the NLS. Five secondary schools held summer literacy schools for Year 6 pupils in the summer of 1999, and the schools concerned are convinced of the value of these. The LEA has recently appointed an additional adviser to focus on literacy in Key Stage 3, and the literacy advisory team has begun to make an effective contribution in more than half the secondary schools in the county in the last four terms.

**Support for Numeracy**

52. Numeracy support is very well managed through the work done in the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) in primary schools, and this is now being extended into secondary schools. The 2002 targets at both Key Stage 3 and GCSE are somewhat less ambitious than those for literacy, particularly since the 1999 results indicated that in both cases present performance is only some 6 per cent below these.

53. For the NNS, the LEA has identified a larger group of schools (34) to receive intensive support than in literacy (17), and in addition a second group of 60 schools is receiving support at an intermediate level. This intermediate level caters better for the smaller schools that need some support but would be overwhelmed by the full amount of the intensive support entitlement. The support team includes advisers, advisory teachers and numeracy consultants, and the resources are well managed and deployed. No special schools have been included in either category of support, though their teachers have attended training. Consideration is being given to ways of involving them more closely.

54. Training to launch the strategy was of good quality and succeeded in promoting enthusiasm and confidence among teachers, although some pointed out that the scheduling of it left little time for planning. Numeracy co-ordinators in all schools are well supported, and teachers and co-ordinators are on the whole more confident about and comfortable with the work in numeracy than in literacy. The strategy for moderation and evaluation is well developed. Effective use is made of a directory of leading mathematics teachers. Visits to schools support the positive responses about the management and impact of the strategy in the school survey. The strategy is having a positive impact on attainment in most schools. As in literacy, the LEA has introduced schemes in some areas to involve parents and the wider community in the work being done in NNS in partnership with the community education service.

55. Support for numeracy in secondary schools is less intensive, but nevertheless effective. As part of the key skills project, a guidance booklet on numeracy in the Key Stage 3 curriculum was produced, although the use which schools have made of this is variable. In some parts of the LEA there are regular meetings of heads of maths departments in consortia groups, while in others these are less frequent and sustained. Advisers attend some meetings, but do not organise them.

56. In some parts of the LEA, work has already started with heads of mathematics departments to consider the implications of the numeracy strategy for secondary

schools. A series of conferences is planned for the end of this term, designed to ensure that secondary maths teachers know what is happening in the NNS and to provide a further impetus for considering implications for the secondary school.

**Support for Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

57. Support for ICT is unsatisfactory overall. The findings of this inspection confirm the assessment made by the LEA in its EDP, that there is much to be done to improve the quality of ICT in the majority of schools. Although overall attainment in information technology is better than the national average and pupils' progress is in line with the national picture, there is much variability between schools, and the use of communication technology in most schools is at an early stage of development. Against this background, the LEA has rightly made the development of ICT capability and the implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) a priority in the development plan.

58. The authority's policy for some time has been that ICT should have as wide a range of curriculum applications as possible, rather than being taught as a separate range of skills. Beyond this, schools have been expected to develop the work in their own way and at their own pace. The launch of NGfL is the first real whole LEA initiative in this area. Its implementation follows a two stage model. In Stage 1, nearly all schools have been fitted with the infrastructure of cabling and servers. Stage 2, which includes the purchase of PCs and other equipment, starts in the new financial year. All schools should have hardware and an Internet connection by March 2000.

59. In responses to the school survey, a third of primary schools and just under half the secondary schools were highly critical of aspects of NGfL implementation. Conversely, a quarter of primary schools and almost a third of secondary schools considered it was good. Visits to schools reinforced the picture of varied provision of ICT support and of the training available. While some place a high value on both support and training, others are less impressed and some schools have decided to buy support and training from other sources. Schools where ICT work is criticised in inspection reports get priority response from advisers, and this is usually valued by the schools concerned. Adviser and advisory teacher intervention in many schools has produced good outcomes.

60. The ICT support team is small, given the range of work needed and all have responsibility for more than one subject. This limits the time available for ICT support. However, in addition to support work in schools, the team is in the process of building up of a register of good practice. Developments are further assisted through the preparation and issue to all schools of a useful news sheet.

61. It is an LEA target that all schools should have an ICT development plan by 1999. This target has been achieved in most schools through the adoption of an outline ICT policy statement prepared and offered to schools by the LEA. Schools were invited to adapt or customise the plan to their own circumstances. However, it is unsatisfactory that most of the schools visited have adopted it with minimal adaptation, despite the fact that the outline provided is not specific, being a broad declaration of intent rather than a detailed development plan.

62. In some parts of the LEA, schools and community education teams are engaged in potentially effective joint ventures to optimise resources and provide access and training in ICT for members of the community. In one primary school visited during the inspection, a joint venture between school, governors and Age Concern is bidding for funds which will enable the purchase of laptops for school and community use, with community education service involvement in the provision of a tutor.

## Support for Schools Causing Concern

63. The support provided to special measures, serious weaknesses and schools of concern to the LEA is generally good and often very good. The LEA has no schools designated as requiring special measures. The three maintained primary schools and one special school which were judged to require special measures since 1993 are now out of special measures with the help of appropriate LEA support. A further six schools have been categorised as having serious weaknesses and of these four have now been declared by HMI to be making good progress.

64. In addition to those schools identified by OFSTED inspections as having significant weaknesses, the LEA has designated a further 30+ schools as being in one of four categories of "cause for concern". The rigour and tenacity with which the LEA has identified these schools in an area with relatively highly performing schools demonstrates its commitment to ensuring good quality education for all. It also reflects an appropriate understanding about the need to monitor small schools carefully because of their susceptibility to rapid changes in the quality of education caused by staff turnover. Significantly, the LEA has been very effective in working with and improving schools designated as a cause for concern and the number of such schools is now reducing.

65. Whilst the actions taken to address weaknesses in these schools have largely been successful, there is insufficient clarity in the processes established by the LEA to identify and report on such schools. Despite the references contained in the EDP, many schools are unaware of the criteria for designation as a cause for concern by the LEA and few know what the triggers for intervention would be. Although the LEA is very open in its reporting to schools following link adviser visits, there is little understanding in schools about the pattern of reporting and decision taking that surrounds schools regarded as a cause for concern, especially those that fall into the LEA's first category. Even headteachers of schools supported by the LEA in the cause for concern categories are not always aware of which category they fall into.

## Support for Governors

66. The support provided to governing bodies by officers and advisers presents a mixed picture. The quality of training and helpline support is generally satisfactory and often good. However, the mechanisms to inform governors about the outcomes of link adviser visits are insecure and there is no representative forum for routine consultation and discussion with governors about policy issues. A small minority of governors is also critical of poor responses to written queries to the LEA. This variability means that the support for governors is unsatisfactory overall.

67. In this "lean" LEA there are few people employed centrally to service governing bodies. Despite this, the quality of training provided for governors, for example in relation to target setting, is generally good. In the past there have been issues about the convenience of the venues chosen for training but the LEA is now being more flexible and innovative in placing venues around the county. Governors are appreciative of the information provided through the LEA's newsletter, and telephone enquiries by governors to the LEA are competently handled.

68. There is, however, too little routine contact between the LEA and governors to properly cement the partnership between the LEA and these important managers. The views of governors are sought through the minutes of their meetings but there are insufficient regular opportunities for the LEA to meet with governors to discuss and consult on policy issues. A small group of governors which does meet with the LEA is not fully representative of the schools and its membership is not well known to all schools.

69. Although link advisers attend the OFSTED inspection feedback for each school they do not meet with governors routinely during their link visits to schools. Copies of the link adviser notes of visit are provided for the chair of governors, but these are made available through headteachers and there is no firm requirement on headteachers to pass them on. These arrangements are unsatisfactory for assisting governors in discharging their role in evaluating the effectiveness of the school and the LEA's contribution to improvement.

70. The LEA is in the process of consulting schools about the viability of a clerking support service. In those schools visited which expressed an interest in this service it was significant that governors see this as one way of establishing more useful direct contact with the LEA.

**Support for School Management**

71. The LEA provides very good support for school management, mainly through CAMAS and management support services. In the survey, schools' ratings of this support were significantly higher than the mean for the 34 LEAs surveyed.

72. The main features of CAMAS' provision are: training and support for all levels of management; training and support in school development planning and self-evaluation; termly school improvement network meetings for headteachers; and monitoring and support by link and phase-specialist advisers.

73. All schools are now engaged at various stages of development in self-review and over half have been involved in the past three years in LEA-sponsored school improvement projects. They are required to submit action plans and evaluations and to prepare case study reports for publication to other schools. The LEA is concerned to meet the particular needs of the headteachers of its very small schools; it offers an intensive package of support and opportunities to co-operate with schools which are statistical neighbours. In the secondary phase, it is sensibly attempting to compensate for the comparative lack of recent senior management expertise in CAMAS through a joint working initiative with headteachers on performance

management and self-evaluation, with a view to identifying and disseminating best practice.

74.    Crucial to the support for school management is the role of link advisers, whose visits focus on school improvement.  The agenda for the visits is agreed in advance by the headteacher and the link adviser and includes both LEA and school items.  Almost all the headteachers of the schools visited during the inspection value the work of the link advisers, suggesting that they act effectively by advising honestly and professionally about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the school.

75.    The LEA strongly and successfully encourages heads and other members of senior and middle management to undergo training, based on national standards.  For example, the LEA supports new headteachers in its role as a Headlamp provider.   Courses for middle managers and SENCOs, also based on national standards, are provided by the LEA or purchased from other providers.  All schools have received a guidance pack on self-evaluation and most heads and their deputies have been trained by the LEA.  A recent LEA survey produced positive evaluations which were borne out by schools visited during the inspection.  Appropriately, the LEA now intends to extend this training to middle managers.

76.    Regular conferences for headteachers are now supplemented by termly school improvement networks which give heads the opportunity to be informed and consulted on a range of local and national initiatives.   The networks are well attended and more highly regarded by heads than the joint development planning process which is not seen as fully representative.  However, its related task groups, for example on traded services for schools, give headteachers a voice in decisions about how their schools are supported.

77.    Mentoring is provided, usually by a headteacher from a similar size and type of school, for new headteachers and those who are in difficulty.   Pending the introduction of a national system of performance management, headteacher appraisal is not operating consistently throughout the county but a thorough programme of support for newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) meets the new national requirements for the induction year.  Both schools and NQTs have been trained and supported, and link advisers play an important part in the process.

78.    A common view of the headteachers of the schools visited during the inspection was that a key factor of the LEA's success in its support for management was the high quality of relationships between the schools and the LEA at all levels.  Officers, including those in the most senior positions, are accessible and responsive.  Communication is generally good, although sometimes slow, and the LEA's publications are of high quality.  Inevitably, heads of small schools who have limited time for management and administration must rely on the LEA's services more than their colleagues in larger institutions, but there is little undue dependency on the LEA, partly because local networks of headteachers provide strong mutual support.

**Support for Early Years**

79.  The development of Early Years provision has been addressed well by the LEA on the whole.  There is effective collaboration between the LEA and other agencies resulting in generally good quality, broadly available provision.

80.  Despite the challenges presented by the size and rural nature of the county the LEA has helped to forge successful links with a very large range and number of providers to ensure that there are sufficient places for all four year olds in each of the 30 planning areas.  This has been a substantial task requiring that the LEA establish effective working arrangements with 280 private and voluntary settings, as well as over 300 of its own schools.

81.  The Early Years Development and Childcare Plan was approved in June 1999.  It is a comprehensive and very detailed document, which draws on an extensive survey of relevant socio-economic data.  The plan includes an ongoing childcare audit which involves over 1600 registered providers.  The training and guidance associated with the plan have been well received by schools and the evidence suggests that the LEA's Early Years consultants are generally well regarded and effective.

82.  The improvement of education provided for children under five years of age is included as a priority in its EDP.  This priority is well integrated with the others in the EDP to provide a rational set of actions with a clear focus on raising standards.  The LEA has recently completed its own evaluation of progress in relation to this priority and appropriate adjustments have been made to the new draft EDP as a result.  There is clear evidence from the Audit Commission survey and through HMI visits to schools that the support provided by the LEA is helping to raise achievement, particularly in relation to language, literacy and mathematics.  In almost all schools the support provided for pupils with special educational needs in this age range has also been beneficial.

**Recommendations**

**In order to improve the effectiveness of arrangements for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention in schools:**

•  the criteria for categorising schools causing concern at each level, as well as those for schools receiving intensive support for literacy and numeracy, should be made more explicit;

•  the development of pupil-level information needs to be completed and headteachers need training to enable them to make full use of the data;

•  schools need more formal involvement in the evaluation of advisory input into schools.

**In order to improve the effectiveness of governors in their partnership with the LEA they need:**

- more direct access to the evaluations provided by link advisers and more formal arrangements for routine and representative consultation with the LEA on policy issues.

## SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

### Corporate Planning

83.   Strategic planning in the education and library services department has been at least satisfactory but it has taken place in a relative vacuum in terms of overall corporate priorities until recently.   The 1996 "Quality of Life" vision statement produced by the Council contained 14 statements that provided a framework for guiding actions but only one focused on education and none were specific in relation to the raising of attainment.

84.   Despite this, the education and library services joint development plan in 1998 was used effectively to provide a strategic framework for local priorities and statutory plans and facilitated a sense of coherence, in the absence of more focused corporate priorities.   The plan set out seven success criteria against which developments needed to be evaluated. Annual review of performance and forward planning has been carried out by the monitoring and resources sub-committee based on the joint plan.  The current EDP builds very sensibly on the key tasks identified in the school improvement portfolio of the joint development plan and it establishes more rigorous targets than existed before.

85.   Strategic planning at corporate level is now undergoing significant change in connection with both the Modernising of Local Government and Best Value agendas, and following the appointment of a new Chief Executive last year.   Although the corporate policy committee formulated and consulted about a draft corporate plan in 1997/98, it has only recently confirmed its six corporate priorities.   Appropriately, amongst these is "to raise standards of achievement in education and skills through life".

86.   In addition to the better definition of corporate priorities, the new Chief Executive has recently helped to establish a clearer agenda in terms of more coherent approaches to aspects such as social inclusion.  Against this backdrop the education department now has a more solid foundation on which to anchor and develop its future policies.

### Management Services

87.  North Yorkshire has a small core of non-traded central services.   The authority's underlying approach to delegation is a presumption in favour of school autonomy. Traded services, other than personnel, offer packages at different levels. The authority is consistently rated higher by its schools in the provision of services than other authorities in the sample surveyed.  The Council has an established culture of seeking the views of customers of its traded services through surveys and questionnaires.   The outcomes are reported to and reviewed by the joint development planning traded services task group, which comprises school representatives. Support services contribute effectively to the work of the authority in its process of identifying and supporting schools in difficulties or likely to cause concern.

88.   The finance support service in North Yorkshire is very strong.  The traded arm of the service financial management services is managed separately from central finance, although liaison is secure.  The detail of the support and material provided by central finance is clear and comprehensive.  The local authority is continuing to encourage, but not force, all schools to work independently.

89.   Monitoring of school spending is light touch.  However, reconciliation of school budgets and the central ledger is still undertaken manually.  When errors arise they have to be rectified through the completion of a duplicate form and, although it works, it is cumbersome.

90.   Personnel support is a very highly regarded service delivered by  well qualified staff.   The casework function and management and organisational support are particular strengths.  Unlike financial support, there is no division of staffing between traded and core provision.  All schools, except one, buy the service.  Occasionally schools have felt that the leanness of the centre has contributed to the service not matching schools' expectations in some of the detail of the routine appointments' process.  The payroll service performs satisfactorily overall, although it has received similar criticism from some schools.  It will become a separate delegated service from April 2000.

91.   The day to day support for schools' administrative information and communications technology is good.  Hardware and software support is delivered through an IT business unit within corporate services with some staff outposted to the education directorate.  However, the pace of developing and implementing its ICT strategy is slow.  Schools do not have a consistent and common understanding of it.

92.   Overall, management information systems are under-developed.   There is insufficient coherence between the schools' administrative and curriculum ICT systems where they are in place.  A pilot scheme operates in one school, but in the short term the local authority has decided for security reasons to keep the systems separate.  The local authority asserts that all schools have access to electronic mail for administrative purposes through arrangements it has brokered.   This is not matched by practice and understanding at school level.   Data, including student records, are not exchanged electronically between schools or with the local authority.  Most schools visited saw this as a limitation.  The local authority has an embryonic administrative intranet, but it is only used lightly.

93.   All primary and special schools, and most secondary schools, use software systems supported by an external company.   Some secondary schools have changed to an alternative system and the local authority is relying upon emerging convergence involving the development of the unique pupil number to secure longer term coherence and information exchange.  Schools' pupil and staffing databases are not linked with the centre where in turn, although good individual use is made of IT, a number of different systems currently coexist.

94.   Premises support is good.  Active monitoring of the work performance has resulted in contractors being removed from the approved list.  This level of scrutiny is recognised by schools as helpful.  Building stock in North Yorkshire is in a good state

of repair. Most schools visited intend to buy back the comprehensive premises support package offered through the LEA. This level of involvement reflects the reluctance of many schools to assume this budget responsibility alone as well as a high level of trust in the service's reliability.

95. North Yorkshire has met targets in preparing its Asset Management Plan and, overall, has managed its building stock well. All schools have details of condition surveys and schedules of work required. Schools visited understood their responsibilities. The overall cost of work identified through the condition survey exercise is £47m. In exercising landlord responsibilities, the local authority's building inspectors visit all schools at least annually. Meetings with the head are minuted, outstanding work is logged and responsibilities identified. All premises are scheduled to have a full survey over a five-year cycle. The Council intends to programme sufficiency and suitability assessments of school premises together once final guidance is received from the DfEE.

**Recommendations**

**In order to improve the quality of ICT both in the curriculum and in school management:**

- the ICT strategy should have a clear focus on integration, convergence and coherence, schools should be fully involved in its development, and clearer guidelines are needed in relation to schools' own ICT development plans.

**SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION**

**Strategy and provision**

96.   The support for special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory overall, but some aspects need improvement.   The LEA is making a determined effort to improve, having recognised the need to do so and having overcome recent staffing difficulties.   In the survey, schools indicated their broad satisfaction with the LEA's support and visits to schools during the inspection confirmed this picture.

97.   Two key appointments were made in 1999 and since then a draft programme of SEN review and development has been adopted, refined and implemented with enthusiasm, expertise and effective leadership.   The LEA now has a revised policy and a clear strategy for the first stages of improvement in its provision for SEN, expressed in its special needs improvement programme (SNIP).

98.   The SNIP agenda includes some appropriately short timescales for its more straightforward developments so that some outcomes have been achieved quickly. Its priorities are agreed and it has set in motion the initial stages of establishing in consultation with schools a clear view of the pattern of provision it requires in its primary, secondary and special schools.   SNIP sets out the early steps to achieve this, and a set of principles for future provision has been prepared.   However, the means and timetable for consulting appropriately with parents have not yet been established.

99.   The programme includes a well planned and detailed review of the quality of SEN provision in every mainstream school.   This is strongly supported by schools and, although only half completed at the time of the inspection, it is already yielding valuable insights into the detail of strengths and weaknesses.   These have been shared with special needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) to influence practice as quickly as possible.   The best practice identified in schools is being collated for publication within the LEA.

100. The review of SEN is indicative of the LEA's sound focus on school improvement within its strategy for SEN.   The strategy also includes enhancing training for governors, SENCOs and classroom support assistants.   SENCOs are appreciative of their termly network meetings and of training funded by the LEA.   A pilot exercise in delegating additional funding for SEN to schools has been successful, and most larger schools welcome the prospect of more delegation of SEN funds in order to help them to use their staff more flexibly and to intervene earlier to meet the needs of individual pupils.

101. The LEA has broadened the previously narrow responsibilities for SEN provision so that they are shared by all relevant departments within the LEA in line with the whole LEA approach to SEN.   For example, all link advisers are taking part in the review of schools' SEN provision.   The training of the non-specialist advisers for the review, and their observations and analysis of SEN provision, have enhanced the interest and confidence of the advisory team in the field of special needs.

102. The quality of SEN support services to schools is good.  However, the availability to schools of the educational psychology, behaviour support and learning support services is often unsatisfactory owing to the large caseloads of individual service members.  The SNIP initiative includes a review of the deployment of all services.  The allocation of services to schools is generally on a needs basis, with a view to avoiding unnecessary time being spent in schools with little requirement for services.  While this makes good use of limited resources, the process is not transparent to schools.  The sensory support service has developed a set of criteria for levels of involvement which could provide a good model to share with schools.

103. The LEA meets statutory requirements with respect to SEN, except in the completion of statements within the required timescale of 18 weeks.  Its overall performance in this area is unsatisfactory even though there has been some improvement in the number of delays for which the LEA is directly responsible.  The LEA's own target for completion of statements within 18 weeks in 2000/01 is too low and only marginally exceeds its current performance.  This target excludes those statements where delays arise from the slow response to requests for written advice from agencies outside the LEA, including medical officers.  When these exceptions are taken into account, the situation is actually worsening and the LEA is currently meeting with its five health trusts to address this.  The quality of statements varies unacceptably; many have only cursory accounts of pupils' needs and the provision required to meet them.  The quality of target setting and subsequent review of targets in pupils' annual reviews also varies, and in some schools is weak.  A recent survey of the review process (as part of SNIP) has led to appropriate action by the LEA.

**Recommendations:**

**In order to improve support for children with special educational needs, the following actions need to be taken:**

- establish as soon as possible the desired pattern of provision for SEN, particularly in relation to the role of special schools, and establish strategies for taking account of parents' views in this process;

- produce all statements within statutory time limits and improve the quality of statements.

**SECTION 5: ACCESS**

**The Supply of School Places**

104. North Yorkshire has a School Organisation Plan (SOP), which has been approved by the School Organisation Committee. Although the plan is detailed and supported with much statistical analysis, it does not clearly set out an objective strategy with triggers for tackling surplus places and under-capacity.

105. The net surplus of places in primary schools is 11.5 per cent. The local authority contends, however, that because of the large number of small schools in North Yorkshire, 4.9 per cent is the realistic level of removable surplus places. The Council is right to point out that factors such as its rural nature, the large number of small schools, the extent of provision supported by the diocesan authorities, and the focus on pupil achievement and quality of teaching make a more insistent approach difficult and often inappropriate. The need to identify capital to support rationalisation is also a major consideration before embarking on any significant work. The SOP does, however, identify three areas where surplus place reviews are relevant and offers scope for clarifying the responsibilities, timescales and criteria for action in line with District Audit recommendations.

106. The percentage of secondary school surplus places is lower at 5.6 per cent. Although North Yorkshire has a number of small secondary schools, these invariably serve remote communities. The challenge in managing secondary places is in responding to over-subscription for some schools. This has been the focus of a substantial element of the planned capital programme.

107. The LEA has effectively managed a major Private Finance Initiative involving the replacement of four primary schools. The process has been complex and made substantial demands on staff time. The schools affected have been suitably involved in all aspects of the process.

108. The local authority has been assisted with revenue and capital funding to implement its Key Stage 1 class size programme and is in line to ensure all classes will comply with the maximum class size requirements.

**Admissions**

109. The management of the admissions process in North Yorkshire is good. Full details are set out in the admissions booklets for community, voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools. The booklets are well set out and in most respects comply with the expectations of the Code of Practice. The recent District Audit draft report has noted the absence of any assistance with minority community languages and the local authority has confirmed it will address this issue. In addition, the Council recognises that the wording in its second and subsequent criteria for dealing with over-subscription is unclear and needs to include an unambiguous statement in requiring the expression of a preference. In practice, the ability to meet the first parental preference (98.77 per cent in primary and 93.85 per cent in secondary in

1999) is high, even though there is a selective system in the Ripon and Craven areas.

110. The scale of the county and the mix of catchment area and selection criteria test the authority's systems. It is creditable that primary appeals lodged by the closing date are completed by the third week in June and secondary appeals by the end of May. Staffing levels have been increased in local offices in part to handle increasing numbers of appeals and to continue to meet deadlines. Satisfactory liaison exists with neighbouring authorities over the secondary transfer arrangements. Although the admissions and appeals system appears to work very well overall, the local authority has not confirmed this through a survey of users.

111. An aspect of the allocation process which may warrant review occurs where there is a balance to be secured between parental choice and the potential disruption to a child's education. This involves the provision of a waiting list until the end of October for schools that remain oversubscribed after the beginning of the autumn term. This appears to have involved eleven transfers in the last three years with a larger number of parents contacted. Pressure on secondary school places could make this a more significant issue in the future.

112. The District Audit report confirmed a good level of accuracy in pupil forecasting. However, much depends on the flow of information to the local authority from schools. The absence of a common pupil database inhibits the tracking of pupil information and the arrangements for data and record transfer from school to school lacks a consistent approach across the county.

113. The Schools Admissions Forum is in the process of being constituted but has yet to meet.

**Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School**

114. Overall, the LEA makes at least satisfactory provision in this aspect. It has recognised the need for a more coherent and focused strategy and is making suitable progress in implementing it.

115. The number of North Yorkshire pupils who receive education other than at school is low. The LEA's strategy covers access for different categories of pupils, such as those excluded from school or those educated by their parents, and provides clear procedures for each category. Specialist advice, support and teaching are provided by relevant staff. Parents who educate their children are given guidance and are monitored. Pupils have access to support and guidance, including careers and health education, through established links between the LEA and other services.

116. The LEA's pupil referral unit (PRU) in Harrogate closed in April 1998 for a review of its role and responsibilities. In January 2000, the LEA honoured a promise to its secondary headteachers by opening two PRUs in Harrogate and Scarborough. They are concentrating on Key Stage 3 pupils and are providing short-term intensive support aimed at early re-integration into school. It is too early to judge their success. However, the distances involved are too great for PRUs to be the only

form of provision for pupils excluded, or in danger of exclusion, from school and the LEA is sensibly developing school-based models of support for areas with small or scattered populations. There are early indications that the number of exclusions is falling and, as this occurs, the LEA has appropriate plans to develop the role of the PRUs into broader alternative educational provision.

117. The LEA's approach to education other than at school has been too fragmented in the past and it is currently engaged in the important processes of developing one coherent policy and of combining its three area databases into one. Twelve per cent of children who are educated other than at school receive over 20 hours of tuition weekly and 24 per cent have between 10 and 20 hours. The majority of pupils (64 per cent) have between 5 and 10 hours of tuition but most children in this last category have medical conditions, some of which are short term. The LEA states that all excluded pupils already receive full time equivalent provision and it is aiming to secure similar levels for all pupils who are out of school within five years.

118. In the survey, primary schools rated the LEA's alternative provision for pupils excluded or out of school for another reason as good, and significantly above the mean for the 34 LEAs surveyed. By contrast, secondary schools judged it to be poor and significantly below the mean, probably because of the lack of PRU provision at that time. The LEA has recognised the need for a more coherent and focused strategy and is moving in the right direction but there is still some way to go.

**Attendance**

119. The attendance of most pupils in North Yorkshire's schools is very good. Although a small number of schools have attendance figures which are significantly worse than the county average, the LEA's overall performance places it first in relation to joint absence figures, and to rates of unauthorised absence, when compared with LEAs in similar socio-economic circumstances. This high level of performance is due to a combination of the schools' own efforts and the work of the very effective education social work service (ESWS).

120. Through the joint development planning process, the service has agreed with headteachers' representatives a strategy of five levels of engagement with schools according to their needs. Under the service delivery framework, each school has named education social worker (ESW) and the amount of time given to individual schools is allocated according to a formula which places schools in four bands. For example, schools in band 1 only receive support in response to their referrals whereas those in band 4 benefit from five half-days of ESW support weekly. All schools receive support materials. This sound system of graded intervention according to need accords well with the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. However, it has not been communicated effectively to schools. None of the schools visited during the inspection was aware that this was the LEA's approach or of which band they were in.

121. Until recently, the LEA's attendance data for vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, Travellers and young offenders, have been inadequate, but their quality is now improving owing to more effective co-operation between the ESWS and other relevant county services. Resources have been targeted to schools which have the

greatest difficulty with attendance, for example through the home/school support worker project which was initially funded by the Home Office and has received very positive external evaluations. Home/school support workers deal with challenging behaviour as well as attendance and a school visited during the inspection was clearly benefiting from this work.

122. In the survey, the schools' rating of the quality of support to improve attendance was significantly above the mean for the 34 LEAs surveyed. The LEA's spending on the service is in line with that for other English counties, slightly above that for similar LEAs and below the national average. The service provides good value for money.

## Behaviour Support

123. The quality of behaviour support is good and the service is working hard to achieve higher standards.

124. Although still at a developmental stage, the LEA's Behaviour Support Plan is of good quality. It covers all the key strategic areas and is linked to other relevant plans. In general, its targets are realistic and achievable but some, for example on attendance, need to be more specific. There was very thorough consultation on the plan and it is subject to regular review. Supplements, for example on education other than at school, have been issued. The plan accords well with the DfEE Good Practice Guide and relevant legislation.

125. The behaviour support service was a casualty of re-organisation in 1996 but it was revised and enhanced in 1998. It now has dynamic leadership which is determined that the service will be integrated effectively into the LEA's wider provision. The service is accountable to CAMAS for whole school work and pupils' attainment and to Pupil and Parent Support (PPS) for service planning, casework, budget management and inter-agency work. In order to encourage necessary closer links between CAMAS and PPS, joint meetings and training events are now held, for example with link advisers.

126. In the survey, the ratings of both primary and secondary schools concerning support for improving behaviour were significantly above the mean for the 34 LEAs surveyed. The service now operates with responsiveness and flexibility which are much appreciated by schools. It is implementing a sound strategy of early intervention in schools that agree to a two-way commitment. The service provides support for cases where there has been no statutory assessment or exclusion and the school uses the support to make progress so that the resources can be reduced or deployed elsewhere. Positive reactions to schools' needs and initiatives have included enhanced teaching and non-teaching staffing, and the development of alternative learning programmes for pupils in danger of exclusion. A number of schools have received assistance with the development of positive behaviour policies.

127. The costs of the service have been significantly lower than those in LEAs with similar socio-economic circumstances. However, additional resources have been allocated for 2000/01 in recognition of the LEA's commitment to this aspect and the

implications of DfEE Circulars 10/99 and 11/99 in developing the agenda for social inclusion. The schools visited during the inspection were in agreement that the caseloads of behaviour support teachers are too large, causing visits to be irregular. Their work in schools is generally good, although advice is occasionally unrealistic and an appropriate balance is not always achieved between the needs of individual pupils and the wider needs of the school and its other pupils.

128. Evidence from Section 10 inspections shows behaviour in the LEA's schools to be good. The number of permanent exclusions has been low, at just over 90 a year, for a number of years and this year there are significant signs of improvement. At the time of the inspection, the number was 29 and the LEA's projection of 65 for the full year appears realistic. If the projection is realised, the LEA will almost have achieved its challenging target for 2002 of reducing permanent exclusions by a third.

**Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection**

129. Following an inspection carried out by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) at the end of 1998, the management arrangements for health and safety have been effectively restructured. They now provide satisfactory management for school security matters, for risk assessments in schools, and for liaison with buildings section. All other recommendations in the report have been given close attention, and work to implement them is proceeding.

130. As a result of a detailed risk assessment of security and safety features in school buildings undertaken by a private company, all schools have had Standards Fund money to provide adequate security measures.

131. The HSE reports drew attention to the need to develop a way of working that would ensure all significant school based risks are managed by someone on site who has ready access to officers of the LEA capable of sanctioning necessary measures. The LEA has issued detailed guidance to schools in the form of practice handbooks covering risk management, response to emergencies, school security, and arrangements for educational visits and adventure activities. A guidance folder containing advice on schools' responsibilities for health and safety has also been issued, but some schools have not yet designated and trained a nominated person.

132. Arrangements for child protection are very good and the service is well managed. The principal ESW is the nominated child protection officer for the LEA. Responsibilities are executed chiefly through a deputy ESW whose work is almost entirely in this field. A detailed and thorough programme of training is organised, much of it jointly with other agencies and services concerned with children's welfare. OFSTED reports are monitored carefully to identify schools in which there is any critical comment about child protection arrangements, and appropriate action is taken in such cases.

133. All the schools visited have a nominated teacher and all have done training or are earmarked for training. A good proportion is inter-agency training, in which teachers meet and work alongside officers of other agencies concerned with children's welfare. This fosters a better understanding of each others' responsibilities and limitations. The ESWS produces a series of regular up-dating

leaflets to ensure that schools know about new legal requirements and other policy and practice developments.

**Looked-After Children (Young People in Public Care)**

134. As a result of recent initiatives, the provision for looked-after children has improved to a position where it is now satisfactory. However, appropriately, the LEA is not satisfied with this standard and intends to make further improvements.

135. The Children's Services Plan makes clear that the LEA is conscious of its statutory duty to act as effective parents and one of the key actions identified in its Behaviour Support Plan is to improve the arrangements for looked-after children, who constitute about two in every thousand of school age. About 80 per cent are placed with foster parents, adoptive parents or their own parents and most attend mainstream schools

136. Members have agreed that the education and social services directorates should work jointly on support for looked-after children. The policy on their education raises awareness of their needs, confirms the authority's commitment to work in partnership to meet those needs, establishes roles and responsibilities and provides a framework for joint procedures. The existing shifting the balance policy has been made more rigorous by the Quality Protects management action plan. Improvements in practice are already clear.

137. A database has been established which identifies every child and enables accurate monitoring of his or her attainment. However, although the LEA knows the identity and whereabouts of every looked-after child, there is no satisfactory system for updating the information held by schools on a regular basis.

138. With the aid of the Standards Fund, the LEA is to establish in the summer term a post with responsibility for looked-after children. The social services directorate intends to make a similar appointment and the two will work closely together. Their role will be to translate policy into practice and provide training and information for schools in relation to their responsibilities. This is a positive example of effective co-operative working for improvement.

139. A joint working group, including heads, officers, social workers and carers has made very good progress in producing a strategy on the education of looked-after children, which is now the subject of wide consultation. In 1998/99, 84 per cent of looked-after children gained 1+ GCSE grades at A*-G in comparison to 98 per cent in the LEA as a whole. The corresponding figures for 5+ A*-G grades were 41 per cent and 90 per cent respectively. The LEA has set itself the challenging target of raising the performance of looked-after children to match that of their peers.

**Ethnic minority children (including Travellers)**

140. Although the LEA has only a small proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, there has been insufficient action to meet their needs, which have been too narrowly interpreted, both in the LEA and in some of its schools. The LEA

is now taking steps to improve this unsatisfactory situation and to provide more effective support.

141. Only 1.1 per cent of the LEA's school pupils are from minority ethnic groups and they are scattered widely across the county. In 1998/99, 105 pupils in 52 schools received support for English as an additional language (EAL). This support dealt with 29 languages. Support is also provided for children from 10 official Traveller sites, for those who visit the county with travelling fairs and for some 40 Kosovan refugees.

142. The EDP makes no reference to how the needs, other than EAL, of minority ethnic pupils are met, although it refers to "benchmarking for consistency to achieve equal opportunities for pupils with individualised needs across a very dispersed schools network". The LEA states that it has systems to respond to its context in relation to small schools and dispersed locations, but there is insufficient recognition in the EDP of the needs of small groups of minority ethnic pupils or that their isolation might be an issue. The LEA is in the process of establishing a database and monitoring attainment in relation to ethnic minorities, Travellers, EAL pupils and refugees. However, it has yet to make full use of the information to promote progress. The chief focus of the Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) action plan is on EAL rather than on broader educational achievement but its approach to Traveller education is better.

143. In the survey, schools rated the LEA's support for meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils as between satisfactory and good but visits to schools during the inspection revealed that they had been referring to support for EAL and Travellers, both of which are effective. The LEA's provision for Traveller education was inspected shortly before this inspection. Notable achievements were identified and the service was found to provide good value for money.

144. The LEA runs an annual course on multi-cultural awareness and there are appropriate references in its documents relating to quality standards for the rounded development of children and young people. Headteachers have also had the opportunity to spend a day in a city with a multi-cultural population. However, the visits to schools confirmed that the LEA has not done enough to counter-balance its predominantly mono-cultural context. Several schools have realised that their virtually all white population makes it even more necessary that they should include multi-cultural projects in their curricula but they have done this largely on their own initiative. Occasionally, schools have received support in this area in response to a key issue for action in a Section 10 report. The LEA has also given insufficient attention to meeting the broader educational needs of its ethnic minority pupils, although effective support has been given for school improvement projects in a primary school with a predominantly ethnic minority intake.

**Social Exclusion**

145. The LEA's approach to combating social exclusion is not yet sufficiently coherent to be satisfactory. However, the Council is in process of developing a corporate policy and strategy on social inclusion. Its level of commitment to combating social exclusion is clear and there is a firm intention to unite its separate

services within an overall approach. Social inclusion features in the draft revised EDP and an LEA policy and strategy are being devised to complement the planned corporate ones. Two senior officers are to be appointed soon to take this work forward and training has taken place for LEA and school staff at various levels. These are all essential initiatives as there is much still to do in the development of principles for and a coherent approach to social inclusion.

146. The LEA endorses the philosophy of the Warnock Report that the purpose of education for all children is the same although individuals will need different help. Its approach to social inclusion was agreed with headteachers' representatives in the joint development planning process but it has largely been focused on special educational needs. In relation to SEN, the LEA has developed a set of sound principles which would form a very suitable basis for an overall policy and strategy for social inclusion.

147. Although various strategies, such as attendance, behaviour support, continuing education and EMTAG, contribute to inclusion, there has been little evidence of a coherent approach covering all groups in danger of social exclusion, and especially the small number of children from minority ethnic groups. Guidelines for schools on anti-bullying, issued in November 1999, include a statement of schools' duties in relation to racial harassment. However, it is cause for concern that the LEA has no clearly stated anti-racist policy, has not appointed a working group specifically to take action on the findings of the report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson report), and does not formally monitor and record racist incidents in its schools.

**Recommendations**

**In order to ensure the implementation and review of the School Organisation Plan in maintaining the momentum in the management of school places:**

- more specific triggers for action, responsibilities and timescales should be built into the detail of the plan.

**In order to ensure that the admissions criteria reflect the local authority's intentions and reinforce parental action:**

- all criteria should include a reference to the expression of a preference and the maintenance of a waiting list and/or the length of the period for which it is maintained should be reviewed.

**In order to improve support for ethnic minority children and to raise schools' awareness of multicultural issues, it will be necessary to:**

- ensure that data relating to the attainment of ethnic minority pupils is used effectively, that the broader educational needs of these children in addition to EAL are met, and that schools are fully supported in raising the multicultural awareness of their pupils.

**In order to combat social exclusion, it will be necessary to:**

- implement as soon as possible a cohesive policy and strategy on social inclusion, including effective procedures to counter racism.

**APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Strategy for school improvement**

In order to ensure that schools are able to plan more effectively and to contribute to the council's resource deployment strategy:

- mechanisms should be established to involve schools more fully in the Council's budget planning process, and budget information should be communicated at an early stage to all schools.

In order to ensure schools apply the principles of best value in the deployment of their budget:

- schools should be required to submit their statements of intent for review as part of the annual monitoring process.

**School improvement**

In order to improve the effectiveness of arrangements for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention in schools:

- the criteria for categorising schools causing concern at each level, as well as those for schools receiving intensive support for literacy and numeracy, should be made more explicit;

- the development of pupil-level information needs to be completed and headteachers need training to enable them to make full use of the data;

- schools need more formal involvement in the evaluation of advisory input into schools.

In order to improve the effectiveness of governors in their partnership with the LEA they need:

- more direct access to the evaluations provided by link advisers and more formal arrangements for routine and representative consultation with the LEA on policy issues.

**Strategic Management**

In order to improve the quality of ICT both in the curriculum and in school management:

- the ICT strategy should have a clear focus on integration, convergence and coherence, schools should be fully involved in its development, and clearer guidelines are needed in relation to schools' own ICT development plans.

**Special Education Provision**

In order to improve support for children with special educational needs, the following actions need to be taken:

- establish as soon as possible the desired pattern of provision for SEN, particularly in relation to the role of special schools, and establish strategies for taking account of parents' views in this process;

- produce all statements within statutory time limits and improve the quality of statements.

**Access**

In order to ensure the implementation and review of the School Organisation Plan in maintaining the momentum in the management of school places:

- more specific triggers for action, responsibilities and timescales should be built into the detail of the plan.

In order to ensure that the admissions criteria reflect the local authority's intentions and reinforce parental action:

- all criteria should include a reference to the expression of a preference and the maintenance of a waiting list and/or the length of the period for which it is maintained should be reviewed.

In order to improve support for ethnic minority children and to raise schools' awareness of multicultural issues, it will be necessary to:

- ensure that data relating to the attainment of ethnic minority pupils is used effectively, that the broader educational needs of these children in addition to EAL are met, and that schools are fully supported in raising the multicultural awareness of their pupils.

In order to combat social exclusion, it will be necessary to:

- implement as soon as possible a cohesive policy and strategy on social inclusion, including effective procedures to counter racism.