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**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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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 also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local education authority (LEA) on Best Value. 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 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 all schools. The response rate was 88 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four secondary schools, two special schools, seven primary schools and one pupil referral unit. The visits tested the views of 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 Lincolnshire was established as a unitary authority in 1996, following local government reorganisation of Humberside. The authority is located on the southern side of the Humber estuary and occupies tracts of land on either side of the river Trent. Almost half of the population live in the Scunthorpe area, with the remainder living predominantly in small market towns and villages. The rate of unemployment and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals are close to national figures, but average wages are low and there are areas of considerable social deprivation. The proportion of the population with higher education qualifications is substantially below the national average. The council was awarded Beacon status in 2001 for its work in aspects of school improvement.

5. North Lincolnshire is a very good education authority with many strengths and no major weaknesses. The LEA has capitalised on the advantages and minimised the disadvantages of being a relatively small authority. It is outward looking and has a clear view about its current and future role. The director of education and personal development and other senior officers provide very effective leadership. They are well supported by members. The LEA enjoys excellent relationships with its schools and other stakeholders, with whom it works in close partnership. Raising attainment permeates the LEA's thinking. Advisers are highly regarded and provide challenge, as well as very good support, to schools. The LEA has high quality data, knows its schools well and intervenes rapidly and effectively when it identifies concerns. There are currently no schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses.

6. Evidence from OFSTED inspections indicates that schools perform well. Key stage test and GCSE results are generally in line with or above national averages and those of similar LEAs. Rates of improvement are well above the national trend at Key Stage 1 and broadly in line at Key Stages 2 and 3. The improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining at least one GCSE is above the national trend but below it for the proportion attaining five or more passes at grades A*-C.

7. The LEA rightly sees raising educational aspirations in the community in general and, more specifically, improving GCSE performance as its key tasks. There are already encouraging signs that its involvement as a pilot authority in the national Key Stage 3 initiative is leading to improvement which should eventually impact on Key Stage 4. Proposals for the new Education Development Plan (EDP) also include increased emphasis on raising attainment at Key Stage 4.

8. The LEA's main strengths include:

- the quality of leadership given by senior officers;
- strategic planning, performance management and effectiveness of services to support school improvement;
- expertise and deployment of staff to support school improvement;
- the quality and use made of performance data;
- support for raising standards in literacy and numeracy;
- support for schools causing concern;
- support for school management and governors;

- strategic planning and support for pupils with special educational needs;
- working collaboratively with other services and agencies;
- financial and personnel services;
- admission arrangements;
- support for attendance; and
- health and safety, welfare and child protection.

9. The LEA performs all its functions at least satisfactorily but there are some areas of relative weakness or inconsistent performance. For example, despite a sound corporate framework, there is variation in the quality of action planning and performance management arrangements across services. The support provided by property services has recently improved but its quality still varies between schools and there are some shortcomings in asset management planning. There are also some relative weaknesses within aspects of support for: behaviour; children in public care; gifted and talented pupils; and measures to combat racism, although all these areas were judged to be satisfactory overall.

10. There is strong cross-party support for the priorities in education. Members are provided with very good information and advice by officers. There is a clear delegation of responsibilities to senior officers. Members take a keen interest in the performance of individual schools and take their responsibilities towards individual children seriously. However, whilst they are prepared to question and challenge the quality of provision and levels of performance, their official scrutiny role in education is currently underdeveloped.

11. The LEA delegates a relatively high proportion of its budget to schools. There has been a substantial reduction in central expenditure during the past five years but school budgets have been protected. Staffing is generally lean and several services have been stretched further through serious illness amongst key officers. Nevertheless, officers have the expertise, determination and trust of schools to make further improvements and the LEA is well placed to implement the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. North Lincolnshire was established as a unitary authority in 1996 following local government reorganisation of Humberside. The authority is located on the southern side of the Humber estuary and occupies tracts of land on either side of the river Trent. Almost half the population live in Scunthorpe and the adjacent town of Bottesford. The rest of the authority is mainly rural, comprising market towns surrounded by many small villages.

13. The last 20 years has seen a change in the pattern of employment in the area, with a move away from its traditional base of steel making and agriculture. Unemployment is at the national level but average wages are low and there are high levels of social deprivation in Scunthorpe and some rural areas. The proportion of the population with higher education qualifications and the proportion in social classes 1 and 2 are substantially below national averages.

14. The authority has a pupil population of about 26,000, which is slightly below the average of 27,000 for unitary authorities. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with national figures in primary and secondary schools. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils is less than three per cent, well below the national average of 12 per cent. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) is almost identical to the national figure in primary schools and approximately one per cent below it in secondary.

15. There are 14 secondary schools, 69 primary schools (including infant and junior schools), two special schools and two pupil referral units. Pupils transfer from primary to secondary education at the age of 11. Just under a quarter of primary schools have less than 100 pupils. All secondary schools are comprehensive and three have sixth forms. There is one foundation school. Three secondary schools have been awarded specialist college status. There are three Beacon schools in the authority and five schools have been awarded the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark.

16. The authority gained Beacon status in 2001/2002 for its work in special educational needs, transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and support for schools causing concern.

Performance

17. The key features of the LEA's statistical profile for schools' and pupils' performance in 2000 were as follows:

- OFSTED inspections indicate that pupils' attainment on entry to full time education is broadly in line with the national average.

- Attainment at Key Stage 1 is well above the national average and above the average for statistical neighbours¹. Results in tests at Key Stages 2 and 3 in English and mathematics are broadly in line with national and statistical neighbour averages. The proportion of pupils passing at least one GCSE is above the national average and that for statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C and the average GCSE points score are broadly in line with national and statistical neighbour averages.
- Rates of improvement between 1998 and 2000, using rolling averages, are well above the national trend at Key Stage 1 and broadly in line with them at Key Stages 2 and 3. The rate of improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining at least one GCSE pass is above the national trend but below it for the proportion attaining five or more passes at grades A*-C and for the average point scores.
- OFSTED inspections show that North Lincolnshire has an above average proportion of primary schools where the quality of education is good or very good. This proportion has improved at a faster rate than that nationally between first and second inspections. The proportion of secondary schools where the quality of education is good or very good is below average and the rate of improvement has been slightly below the national rate. The proportion of lessons where teaching was judged to be satisfactory or better is above the national average in primary schools and in line with it in secondary schools.
- There are no schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses.
- Attendance is above the national average in primary schools and in line with it in secondary schools. Permanent exclusions are in line with the national average.

Funding

18. North Lincolnshire's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for 2001/02 is in line with the average for its statistical neighbours, though it is some 4.4 per cent below the national average and 2.8 per cent below the unitary average. On its inception in 1996, the council inherited a pattern of spending considerably in excess of the education SSA. Since then the level of spending has reduced, but in the current year will still be 2.6 per cent above the education SSA.

19. The Local Schools Budget per pupil (£2,821) in 2001/02 is very close to the average for statistical neighbours (£2,824) but less than the average for unitary authorities (£2,922) and the national average (£2,944).

20. The level of delegation has increased significantly from 2000/01 to 2001/02. From a figure of 81.7 per cent in 2000/01, well below both the unitary and the national averages, North Lincolnshire now delegates an above average 86.8 per cent.

¹ North Lincolnshire's statistical neighbours are: the Isle of Wight; Redcar & Cleveland; Doncaster; Wakefield; Cumbria; Calderdale; Darlington; York; Northumberland; Rotherham.

21. Retained spending on central administration remains above average at £57 per pupil, compared with unitary and national averages of £50 and £46 respectively. Central spending is well below average both on special educational needs (as a result of high delegation) and access, once home-to-school transport is excluded. Given the rural nature of much of the authority, spending on home-to-school transport is not excessive. Spending on school improvement is close to average.

22. Capital expenditure has risen steadily from a negligible amount in 1996 to over £5 million in 2001/02. The authority has been successful in gaining funding for specific projects relating, for example, to the removal of surplus places and to reorganise special schools; the latter involving a project costing over £6 million.

23. The authority has not been able to gain access to significant sums of additional grant funding. It does not qualify for some major funding streams such as Excellence in Cities and was unsuccessful in its bid for an Education Action Zone. Standards Fund grants have, however, been taken up in full.

Council Structure

24. The council has 42 members, with Labour being the majority party. In April 2001, in line with the agenda for modernised local government, the council replaced its committee structure with a cabinet system. Labour holds all eight portfolios in the cabinet, including education and leisure. The cabinet makes recommendations to a wider cabinet committee, whose membership reflects the overall political composition of the council. A number of working groups, involving both Labour and Conservative members, consider key cross-cutting issues, including social inclusion, lifelong learning and information technology. There are two scrutiny panels which cover all council services.

25. An education forum, which includes representation from the old education and leisure services committee and an expanded membership of headteachers, governors and students, meets with the cabinet member and director of education and personal development to advise on policy changes and their operational implications. This forum is an attempt to restore some of the opportunities for a wide range of stakeholders to be involved in discussing key educational issues which had been lost through the adoption of the modernised structure.

26. The education and personal development directorate encompasses education and leisure services and includes libraries, leisure centres, country parks, museums and arts centres. The directorate is divided into three divisions: learning services; personal development; schools and directorate services. A recent appointment has been made at assistant director level for inclusion and special educational needs. This post holder is line managed by the director of education and personal development but is also a member of the senior management team in the social and housing services directorate.

The Education Development Plan (EDP)

27. The LEA's revised EDP is good and is being implemented effectively. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) approved the LEA's original EDP for 1999-2002 without conditions. The priorities for improvement are:

- Raising standards in literacy as part of life long learning
- Numeracy
- Information communication technology
- Quality of teaching
- Leadership, management and governance
- Improving the achievement of schools, groups and pupils of concern
- Special educational needs

28. The LEA's audit of strengths and weaknesses was thorough and made good use of its high quality data. There was also very thorough consultation with schools and other stakeholders. The priorities and associated action plans reflect local needs as well as national priorities. For example: priority one includes an emphasis on early family literacy; priority four includes support for modern foreign languages and religious education which were both areas identified as being relatively weak in the audit. Schools and other stakeholders are well aware of the priorities and support them strongly.

29. The revised EDP improves on the original by sharpening its focus and targeting its actions more precisely on specific groups of pupils. It also takes account of changes since the original EDP, such as the LEA's involvement as a pilot in the national Key Stage 3 initiative. Priority four remains broad and to some extent overlaps with other priorities. The inclusion of activities in the EDP outside of those which are centrally funded makes the EDP slightly unwieldy. The LEA recognises this and is proposing to separate centrally funded activities from support purchased by schools in its next EDP. It is also rightly seeking to strengthen further the emphasis on raising attainment at Key Stage 4.

30. The EDP takes account of corporate priorities and is itself reflected in other key plans. The activities in the EDP are for the most part cross-referenced to these plans. Action plans supporting the priorities are generally coherent, feasible and likely to lead to improvement.

31. Success criteria for the activities are closely linked to intended outcomes and most are precise and quantified. The activities are realistically costed and resources are clearly linked to the priorities. The LEA has a rigorous system for tracking expenditure against EDP priorities. Responsibilities and arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the EDP are clear and effective. Members, schools and other stakeholders are kept informed about progress in implementing the EDP against the success criteria.

32. The LEA's targets for 2002 and beyond are challenging. The LEA met its targets for 2000 in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 but fell short of its target for pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C by approximately two per cent. Key Stage 2 test results for 2001 in English and mathematics indicate that the

rate of improvement has been slow, reflecting the national trend, but the LEA is still on course to achieve its 2002 targets. GCSE results for 2001 indicate that the LEA was almost six per cent below its target for pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C and it will have difficulty meeting its 2002 target.

33. Progress in implementing the action plans and achieving the priorities identified in the EDP is generally good, particularly for literacy, numeracy, special educational needs, management and governance. Further evidence of the progress on the priorities is contained sections two, four and five of this report.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

34. The authority allocates its resources effectively to clearly defined corporate objectives. While spending above Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) in education has been reduced, and is not as high in percentage terms as other services, there has been a firm commitment to protecting school budgets and ensuring sufficient funding to meet pay awards and inflation in full. Increases in the SSA have in recent years been fully passed on to the education service. When the education directorate has faced cuts in its central spending, these have been approached with due regard to agreed priorities.

35. Consultation with schools on budget issues is effectively carried out through a Fair Funding group and through standing headteacher groups. However, consultation does not begin early enough in the budget cycle. In recent years schools have sometimes received notification of their budget shares later than is desirable, though the LEA meets statutory deadlines and schools are now able to plan their spending on the basis of a three-year budget plan.

36. Budgetary control and management at LEA level are good. The overall variance at outturn in the last two years has not been significant and any over or under spending in individual budgets is identified promptly and appropriate action taken.

37. School budgets are under control, with only a few schools in temporary deficit. The LEA has a good record of working in partnership with schools with large deficits to implement recovery plans. However, school balances are too high with approximately two-thirds of primary schools and one-third of secondary schools carrying forward balances in excess of five per cent. Although schools are required to account for these surpluses, officers are rightly considering how they might be more challenging to schools with excessive balances.

38. The authority has now appropriately embarked on a major review of the funding formula, going back to first principles and taking an activity-led approach. The existing formula is based on outdated assumptions, having been unchanged since well before local government reorganisation and subject to only minor revision subsequently. The involvement of schools in the review process is good. It is secured through the leadership of the review team by a headteacher, along with significant representation of other headteachers and regular feedback and consultation.

Structures for achieving Best Value

39. The council's overall arrangements for Best Value are very sound and the external auditor has issued an unqualified opinion on the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). This is an accessible document that clearly outlines the council's approach and progress. This year the external auditor made significantly fewer recommendations than in 2000. The council has made good progress on the development of guidance for officers, including a Best Value toolkit and improved procedures for the challenge and consultation aspects of the reviews. The review programme has been appropriately rationalised to include broader thematic reviews across services.

40. The council's process for undertaking Best Value reviews is thorough and includes appropriate mechanisms for external challenge, member and headteacher involvement and action planning. The authority has completed corporate reviews of ICT and financial services, involving the education service. These have been inspected elsewhere and judged to be good.

41. A satisfactory performance management framework is in place across the council, though there are some weaknesses in how it is being implemented at the individual service level.

42. The LEA has supported schools well in terms of guidance on Best Value principles and on writing Best Value annual statements, as well as organising training for school staff. There is considerable awareness in schools of the need to achieve value for money in the purchasing of services and other resources but the linking of resource allocation decisions to pupil performance outcomes is less well developed.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

43. The LEA exercises all its functions at least satisfactorily and often well. The advisory services and the services supporting special educational needs (SEN) provide particularly strong support for raising standards. Support for early years education was not inspected in detail but evidence from OFSTED inspections and from the school survey suggests it is effective and highly valued by schools. The LEA also works very effectively with a range of partners and other stakeholders. The relatively weaker areas of support lie in some aspects of management services and in services supporting access to education, but in both these areas there are also examples of good practice.

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

44. The LEA exercises its functions in relation to monitoring, challenge, support and intervention effectively.

45. Schools have been fully consulted over the LEA's role in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools and its strategy in relation to these functions is clearly set out in the EDP and the LEA's partnership documents. The school survey, visits to schools and meetings with headteachers and governors revealed a good understanding and strong approval for the way in which the LEA is interpreting the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations. The work of link advisers and other officers in carrying out these functions is highly regarded across all types of school.

46. Monitoring of schools is very thorough. The LEA has an effective centralised system for maintaining information on pupil performance, as well as a comprehensive range of other information arising from its contacts with the schools. There are regular cross-service meetings to review the progress schools are making. This information, together with a range of other formal and informal contacts with schools, enables the LEA to know its schools well and identify any concerns at an early stage.

47. The LEA categorises schools, for the purposes of deciding upon the level of intervention and support, using a system which grades performance across a range of subjects and other key aspects of the schools' work. This is then discussed with schools using their own evaluation of effectiveness. The system is a good one but could be improved by including all curriculum areas and sharpening the criteria for evaluating performance.

48. Schools receive review visits either every six months, annually or at 18 monthly intervals, according to how they are categorised. Most schools also receive a short additional visit each term from their link adviser for target setting, monitoring EDP priorities and other purposes. Visits to schools confirmed that the level of monitoring and support was in inverse proportion to success and was generally appropriate to the needs of the schools. The LEA has reduced the number of visits to its successful schools during the past few years. Given the very good quality data

and other information the LEA has its disposal, there is scope for further reductions in centrally funded visits to these schools.

49. The LEA encourages school self-review. For example, an agenda is sent to schools prior to the review meeting and schools use this as a basis for self-evaluation. In secondary schools this involves evaluating the effectiveness of individual departments. The LEA carries out its own evaluation and this is then discussed with the headteacher and chair of governors. A decision is reached in the light of the findings as to whether any further action is required on each of the aspects being reviewed. In some of the reviews it is not made sufficiently explicit the LEA's and schools' responsibilities are in taking the actions forward and how they are to be funded. However, the process was found to be effective in the majority of schools visited and one which is generally welcomed by headteachers and governors. The involvement of the chair of governors in the review is a particularly valuable aspect of the process.

50. Nearly all schools buy the service level agreement (SLA) for the advisory service. Schools also have the option of purchasing support by the individual session. The SLA does not specify a precise entitlement to a number of days of advisory support. This option was offered to schools but rejected in favour of a system that allocates days according to needs, defined through the review process. This means that in any one year a school may not get its share of advisory time, although it would expect to receive more support in the following year. Schools prefer this system as they feel it offers greater flexibility in meeting their needs and helps to maintain a high quality service.

51. The LEA is clear about how the time of advisers is being paid for and their deployment is carefully monitored. However, there was a lack of clarity in some of the schools visited about how link adviser visits were being paid for. In some cases it was complicated because the time was paid for through a combination of SLA and central funding. Schools did not express any great concerns about this lack of clarity but it makes it difficult for them to judge whether they are receiving value for money from their SLA. The LEA is able to offer a good range of curriculum support from its own advisers and brokers support when it lacks the necessary expertise or has insufficient personnel to meet the demands of schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, intervention and support:

- ensure schools are clear about which visits by advisers are paid for from the SLA and which are paid for from centrally retained funding.

52. Schools are challenged effectively to improve and raise their performance. The target setting process uses individual pupil data and builds in a considerable element of challenge. Schools are also challenged through the review process and through discussions about what the LEA's performance data shows. The LEA agrees post-OFSTED inspection action plans with schools. It monitors action plans and aspects of school development plans and challenges progress where there are concerns.

53. The advisory service is very well led. Strategic planning and performance management are both good. The personal objectives of advisers are linked to service and corporate objectives and performance is evaluated through regular appraisal, the monitoring of reports and feedback from schools. There is an appropriate programme of induction and professional development for advisers. The work of the advisory service is highly valued by schools and several advisers have made a national contribution. The advisory service was the subject of a pilot Best Value review and takes account of Best Value principles in its work. The service provides very good value for money and has the management capacity and expertise to improve further.

Collection and analysis of data

54. The LEA's support for schools in the collection and analysis of data is very good. Both primary and secondary schools rate the support for target setting and the quality of pupil data significantly better than the mean for other LEAs inspected. Visits to schools confirmed the validity of these views.

55. Very good quality and well presented information is sent to schools. This includes a detailed analysis of the likely attainment of individual pupils in their next end of key stage tests as well as comparative and other benchmarking data. These helpful data emanate from pupils' prior attainment and the use of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's comparative database for similar aged children. Data of a similar quality are also provided for some specific groups; for example, minority ethnic pupils and children in public care. The LEA is working with schools to develop the more secure and detailed database on Travellers' children and pupils with special educational needs, which is still needed.

56. Very effective use is made of the data by link advisers in setting targets with schools and as part of the review process. Headteachers also make good use of the data in monitoring performance and carrying out school self-evaluation. The revised EDP sets out appropriate actions to improve further the quality of data collection and analysis. Progress on implementing the activities within the EDP has been good, especially in the development of better target setting methodologies.

57. Data collection, analysis and target setting are appropriately linked to improving teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy but these links are less well developed across the broader curriculum. The LEA is aware of this and is beginning to develop stronger links between targets, pedagogy and pupils' learning across the whole curriculum. There is good transfer of data between primary and secondary schools, although the electronic transfer of information between schools is not yet secure.

Support for literacy

58. Support for literacy is good. The support pre-dates the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and extends beyond it to include aspects such as, early years and family literacy and the production of good quality resources.

59. Attainment at Key Stage 1 and the rate of improvement are better than in similar LEAs and found nationally. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 and 3 is in line with that found nationally and in similar LEAs with the trend over time being above at Key Stage 2 and in line at Key Stage 3. The LEA is on track to achieve its 2002 Key Stage 2 target of 82 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 and above.

60. The LEA's approach to literacy is coherent, broad and effective. There is strong support for literacy in the early years and for family literacy. The NLS has been implemented effectively across the authority. The team implementing the strategy has very considerable expertise and is well led. Although still embryonic, the LEA's involvement as a pilot in the national Key Stage 3 initiative is helping to support developments in secondary schools. Monitoring of the implementation of the NLS is good and involves members of the literacy team working together with link advisers. The learning services division maintains a useful database that helps to keep the literacy team and other LEA advisers up-to-date on the progress pupils are making. Monitoring visits, together with scrutiny of year-on-year performance in national tests, lead to the identification of those schools requiring intensive support. Support for these schools has been effective, with almost all significantly improving their Key Stages 1 and 2 results.

61. The LEA supports schools with a range of high quality publications and videos which extend beyond the requirements of the NLS. Particularly good quality resources have been produced in co-operation with an independent media company to support literacy at Key Stage 2. Primary schools in the school survey rated the support for literacy significantly better than that found in other LEAs. Although secondary schools graded it less highly, it was still in line with that found elsewhere. Secondary schools visited during the inspection were well aware of the LEA's literacy strategy and the structures to support its implementation.

62. The updated EDP has four activities which are appropriately focused on raising literacy standards across the authority. Effective links have been established with the support provided for pupils with English as an additional language and for those with special educational needs. The LEA is also an accredited assessor for the basic skills agency quality mark; an initiative which is highly relevant to the LEA's overall strategy for raising standards in literacy.

Support for numeracy

63. Support for numeracy is good and extends well beyond the national strategy. Primary and secondary schools both rate the support significantly higher than the mean average for all LEAs in the school survey.

64. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is well above both the national and statistical neighbour averages. The trend over time is also above. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 is broadly in line with national and statistical neighbour averages. The rate of improvement is marginally above the national trend at Key Stage 2, but slightly below it at Key Stage 3. Overall, the LEA is performing at least satisfactorily against similar LEAs and nationally. It is making good progress towards meeting its 2002 Key Stage 2 target of 78 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 and above.

65. The LEA has very successfully implemented the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS), building productively on pre-NNS work within the authority. The development of the Key Stage 3 strategy, although early in its implementation, has an appropriate emphasis on building strong links between the NNS at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

66. The numeracy team is well led, with a good range of subject expertise. It is well-focused on those schools and teachers requiring additional support to implement the NNS more effectively. Monitoring of classroom practice is rigorous as is the analysis of attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. This monitoring provides an appropriate focus for those schools most in need, although the authority has also been able to provide all primary schools with additional numeracy training as part of its drive to raise standards across the authority.

67. Raising standards in numeracy and mathematics is a priority in the EDP. Its strategy underpinning this priority covers all key stages and is appropriately linked to related aspects of support, such as family numeracy. Appropriate emphasis is also given to developing numeracy for pupils with special educational needs. Progress in implementing the activities in the EDP is good, with training courses for teachers well focused on those areas that impact most on raising standards.

68. The authority has produced a very good range of teaching and resource materials, both in printed form and on video, covering a broad range of mathematical skills and concepts. These additional resources have been well received by schools.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

69. Support for ICT is very sound overall and there are some examples of good practice. Schools are fully aware of the LEA's strategy for the development of ICT and fully support it. The LEA maintains a strong team of advisers who also provide support in a neighbouring authority.

70. The LEA has made good progress in implementing the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). The outcomes of a full review of its implementation of the NGfL, together with other evidence, have been used to improve the focus of activities relating to ICT in the revised EDP. The EDP now covers a satisfactory range of activities, although it is insufficiently clear how ICT will be developed in relation to special educational needs and across the whole curriculum.

71. Primary and secondary schools in the school survey rated the quality of support for ICT as significantly better than that found in other LEAs. The LEA's own

evaluation of training indicates that it well regarded by a high proportion of schools. Visits to schools found that the support provided by specialist advisers was generally effective. Support for special educational needs is more limited, but the LEA commissions external advice when the bounds of its own knowledge and experience are exceeded.

72. Training opportunities for teachers to develop their ICT knowledge are sound. Work on developing the use of ICT across the broader curriculum has been limited, although the LEA is beginning to develop some helpful support materials on its Intranet website. Support for training under the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) has been generally well received by schools and all schools are registered with an accredited NOF training provider.

73. The LEA grades the quality of provision for ICT in all its schools using a range of indicators, including inspecting lessons. The LEA evaluates the ICT development plans of all schools. It is intending to further strengthen its information on the implementation of development plans through a series of monitoring visits to schools, commencing in January 2002.

Support for schools causing concern

74. Support for schools causing concern or likely to do so is very good. At the time of the inspection no school was subject to special measures or identified as having serious weaknesses.

75. Two schools have been judged to require special measures and three identified as having serious weaknesses since 1997. One was removed from special measures in 18 months and the other in just over two years. OFSTED inspections of the schools with serious weaknesses found they had improved to the extent that they were no longer causing concern.

76. The identification and support for schools causing concern or likely to do so are a priority in the EDP. The LEA draws up detailed action plans that identify task teams and a range of appropriate strategies to support headteachers, senior managers and governors. Arrangements include clear attention to timescales, the targeting of resources on priorities and the careful monitoring and evaluation of progress. Progress is monitored through the use of well-defined success criteria and quantifiable performance measures.

77. Support from advisers and other personnel in task teams is sustained and well targeted. There is good co-ordination of support across the education services. Personnel services have been effective in tackling difficult staffing issues. Steps such as the deployment of a link adviser as an acting headteacher, using a successful senior manager from another school as an acting deputy headteacher and strengthening governing bodies, have had a positive effect. Advisers have provided good support on a range of teaching, curricular and management issues. Progress against key issues has been subject to frequent review. Schools no longer requiring special measures or no longer with serious weaknesses are monitored carefully and provided with appropriate levels of support.

78. The LEA has identified eight schools where it has concerns and has intervened to provide extra support. The level and nature of support are differentiated according to the extent of the concerns but the strategy is similar to that adopted for schools in special measures or identified as having serious weaknesses. Visits to schools where there were concerns found that the support provided by the LEA was effective in helping them to overcome their difficulties.

Support for governors

79. The LEA's support for governors is good.

80. The services supporting governors are located in different units, but liaison is good and governors are clear about who they need to contact for advice and help. Support for governors was rated as good in the school survey and significantly above the mean for other LEAs. This view was confirmed by a focus group of governors and visits to schools. Chairs of governing bodies praise the quality of consultation and information they receive, both of which are felt to be strengths of the authority. The newsletter, which is circulated to all governors, is of a very good standard, with a suitable balance of LEA information and updates on statutory aspects of governance.

81. The EDP includes an appropriate emphasis on supporting governors. The strategy is sound but the links to school self-evaluation are not made sufficiently explicit. However, the LEA does provide opportunities for governors to participate in self-evaluation and performance review training and these have been well received

82. The small number of unfilled vacancies for LEA nominated governors is below the national average and the LEA is generally quick to fill any vacancies. It has taken appropriate action to support governing bodies in schools causing concern, including the appointment of additional governors.

83. Governors are closely involved in the school review meetings with LEA officers. Governors interviewed during the inspection indicated that these meetings were both productive and challenging, and a helpful aid to understanding the relative strengths and weaknesses of their school. However, governors do not routinely receive the notes from LEA officers who visit their school.

Recommendation

In order to support governors more effectively:

- notes of visits relating to school improvement issues should routinely be copied to chairs of governors.

Support for management

84. The LEA's support for school management is good. OFSTED inspections show that leadership and management are judged as good in a higher proportion of primary schools than is the case nationally and are in line with the national picture in secondary schools. The number of primary schools judged as good or better for

leadership and management has marginally increased. It has remained more or less constant in secondary schools.

85. The EDP includes an appropriate set of activities to support both senior and middle managers. These activities are reflected in the good range of training courses provided by the LEA, including support for new and serving headteachers and continuing professional development courses for middle managers and newly qualified teachers.

86. The LEA has linked effectively with Lincolnshire LEA for HEADLAMP training for new headteachers, and very successfully with the University of Hull for a programme aimed at developing the management skills of subject leaders. Good use is made of the expertise of existing advisers, most of whom have senior management experience in schools. The termly network meetings for subject coordinators are well received.

87. Mentoring is provided for new headteachers, to complement the work of the school link adviser. Headteachers indicated that they found link advisers provided both challenge and valuable support to management, confirming the very positive responses in the school survey.

88. The LEA has been actively involved in developing school self-review through a range of training courses. These courses are well received and the inspection found evidence of their effectiveness in the schools visited. The school review meetings also provide headteachers with valuable professional development experiences.

89. The proportion of teacher vacancies is similar to the national picture. Schools, particularly those in more challenging circumstances, are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain teachers of a suitable standard. A number of headteachers reported very poor fields for vacancies, including middle and senior management posts. The LEA has recently appointed a teacher recruitment and retention strategy manager. The collection and analysis of data is being undertaken as a sensible first step to developing a more coherent recruitment and retention strategy. However, much remains to be done and the professional associations, together with some headteachers and governors, voiced a concern during the inspection that the LEA is not being sufficiently pro-active in attracting teachers to the authority.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

90. The strategic management of the authority is very sound. The corporate priorities are clear and both reflect and drive the priorities for education. There is a clear corporate framework for performance management which is applied across the council. The directorate management plan for education sets the priorities and performance indicators for services, which in turn establish individual targets and training plans.

91. The council's Best Value Performance Plan is essentially the authority's corporate plan. The council is currently working on producing its community plan and the intention is that this will become its overall strategic plan. The current lack of a corporate plan means that occasionally decisions have been made by members on corporate issues that have financial implications for education but are not included in the education service plan.

92. There is a strong commitment to education and it is seen as the council's top priority. The director for education and personal development is one of five corporate directors. Education is fully represented in corporate decision making and takes a lead role in a number of cross-cutting council initiatives.

93. There is strong cross-party support for the priorities in education. The leader of the council and the cabinet member for education both have a detailed understanding of national and local education issues and take a keen interest in the performance of the service. There is a clear scheme of delegation and members do not interfere unduly in the day to day management of services. Members generally make timely and effective decisions. The decision making process generally works well. However, some reservations were expressed by opposition members, the professional associations and dioceses about the effectiveness of the education forum and the general lack of opportunities to be involved in the democratic process.

94. Members receive regular reports on progress in education and consider OFSTED inspection reports on individual schools. The two scrutiny committees cover all council services. In education there has been a scrutiny report on possible changes to the school year and one on gifted and able pupils was taking place during the inspection. The report on the school year was thorough, but the criteria for deciding on the priorities for scrutiny are not clear. There is also a lack of clarity at member level about the relationship between Best Value and scrutiny, particularly with regard to following up improvement plans from Best Value reviews. As in other authorities, the scrutiny role is a new one for members and one that is still relatively undeveloped. Members are aware of these shortcomings and are taking action to address them.

Recommendation

In order to improve corporate planning:

- clarify the criteria for deciding on priorities for scrutiny and the relationship between the scrutiny and Best Value review processes.

95. The director and senior officers provide very good leadership. They have a clear vision for the LEA which is shared by schools and other stakeholders. They provide members, schools and other stakeholders with an accurate assessment of the authority's strengths and weaknesses. Their plans for improvement are clear and practical and they are implemented effectively in partnership with schools and other agencies. They enjoy very good relationships with schools and have the trust and confidence of headteachers. Relationships with schools are not 'cosy'; officers are prepared to challenge poor performance and do not shirk from taking tough decisions. Officers also have a good professional relationship with members and provide them with high quality and timely advice, as well as useful progress reports on key initiatives.

96. Planning and performance management arrangements in individual services are based on a sound corporate framework. They vary in quality. They are good in the advisory service and in the services supporting special educational needs. In these services there are sharp performance indicators for the services and individuals which are monitored using a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Elsewhere the development targets are not always supported by sufficiently detailed action plans. The quality of monitoring arrangements for service plans shows a similar pattern. In some services there is a reliance on performance indicators which are not always sufficiently related to development targets.

Recommendation

In order to improve corporate planning:

- ensure that all service plans include detailed action plans and strategies for monitoring development targets.

97. The LEA has benefited from the advantages of being a relatively small authority. The good relationships, effective communications and common sense of purpose are all examples of this. At the same time, the LEA has been successful in minimising many of the disadvantages of being small by working in partnership with other authorities, brokering support where necessary and using external consultants. The LEA has been outward looking and keen to be involved in national initiatives. It is a pilot for the national Key Stage 3 initiative, it is a Beacon authority for aspects of school improvement and has successfully supported three of its secondary schools in gaining specialist status and three schools in obtaining Beacon status.

Partnership

98. The LEA works very effectively with other agencies and other council services. Agencies spanning a number of LEAs identified North Lincolnshire as one of the best in terms of working relationships. The LEA has a sound structure for writing and implementing statutory plans that ensures relevant bodies are consulted at each stage of the process.

99. Liaison with the social services and housing directorate is good. There are regular meetings at senior and third tier officer level and joint protocols have been drawn up to ensure effective co-operation at the operational level. The school survey puts relationships with social services in the top 25 per cent of LEAs and visits to schools generally confirmed these findings. Relationships with the health authority are also good and there is effective joint work in such areas as health education, immunisation programmes, the prevention of young teenage pregnancies and raising drug awareness.

100. There are similarly good links with the early years and childcare partnership and the education business partnership. Joint working with the Learning and Skills Council and with post-16 providers is still at a relatively early stage of development, but sound structures have been put in place to facilitate future developments. A particularly effective partnership has been established with a local media company which has worked closely with the LEA to produce television and video programmes to support Key Stage 2 and is engaged in an ambitious project working with pupils who are disaffected.

101. There is very good co-operation with the dioceses on admissions, school place planning and asset management. There is effective joint working in developing religious education in schools. Arrangements for the standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE) work well and a new agreed syllabus is being introduced across the authority. There is also good co-operation on governor training and supporting schools where there are concerns.

Management services

102. The LEA's management services for schools are never less than satisfactory and often good. There is a high level of buy-back of services and most are well regarded by schools. Support is well co-ordinated through regular meetings of advisers, finance and personnel staff.

103. Service level agreements (SLAs) are satisfactory overall but have some shortcomings. They are generally concise and well presented but lack detailed description and only a few contain differentiated service levels. Consultation with schools has led to some revision of provision but mechanisms for gathering customer feedback on the performance and quality of services are not always sufficiently robust.

104. The LEA is at an early stage in promoting an autonomous approach to procurement in schools. For example, it has provided schools with names and addresses of alternative providers of financial support but does not provide comparative cost information or help schools with quality assurance.

105. **Financial services** are effective and well regarded by schools. Schools are able to buy different levels of support to suit their needs. All schools purchase basic financial services, with a quarter of primary schools buying the school bursar service and a small number buying a more extensive 'business manager' service. The service has been responsive to issues raised by schools. The financial benchmarking information provided to schools is potentially helpful but is not well presented or easily used.

106. The authority's strategy for **ICT** to support administration is sound. There is a clear structure for planning and consultation, involving elected members and representatives from schools at all levels. This promotes coherence with corporate developments and with curriculum ICT support, which is separately delivered. Milestones for implementation of the strategy are clearly defined and monitored rigorously by officers and members. The strategy is carefully dovetailed to national developments and the LEA is on course to transmit electronically all pupil level data to the DfES by January 2002. However, the electronic transfer of pupil data between schools is not yet secure.

107. Support to schools for ICT in administration is generally satisfactory. All schools now purchase a support service from the LEA, compared with only two-thirds in the early days of the authority. Training on a variety of new software packages is available and the authority provides valuable advice on both hardware and software purchase.

108. **Personnel support** is good and highly valued by schools. All schools purchase one of the three levels of service, introduced this year at the request of schools. Officers rightly recognise the need to make the highly regarded counselling and welfare service available to schools purchasing the basic level of provision.

109. Following a recent restructuring of the service, headteachers now have one point of contact with the service. This is a sensible development. Support on individual personnel issues is highly regarded. Payroll functions are exercised efficiently. The personnel service is currently consolidating all policies and procedures provided for schools, but there is as yet no overall plan for completing this major exercise.

110. **Property services** to schools are satisfactory overall and improving. However, the support is of variable quality, with some schools regarding the service very positively, while others complain of a lack of customer focus. The decision by a small number of schools to buy property services from an alternative provider alerted

the authority to shortcomings in the service. In partnership with schools, procedures have now been put in place to ensure greater consistency of approach and a better focus for the role of the building surveyor. There were examples in the schools visited of the LEA managing major building projects very effectively.

111. The LEA provides an effective **home-to-school transport** service which is in line with statutory requirements and well regarded by the majority of schools. There is currently no appeal mechanism for parents and the authority is rightly considering its introduction. A corporate Best Value review of transportation in 2000 resulted in an appropriate reorganisation of responsibilities for transport across the council and sound financial monitoring and liaison systems are in place to secure a coherent service.

112. The **catering** service is effective and responsive with a differentiated SLA. It is highly regarded by both primary and secondary schools and good procedures for liaison are in place.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

113. The LEA has a good strategy for SEN. A clear and comprehensive policy incorporates the most recent statutory requirements and developments in good practice for extending inclusion and raising achievement. The policy is well supported by a very good five-year strategic development plan that is based on a thorough analysis of needs and extensive consultation with schools, parents and voluntary groups. The plan is well presented and has appropriate timescales for implementation. The targets for service delivery are very challenging. Indeed, some are too ambitious and not based on a sufficiently rigorous analysis of data or a realistic assessment of likely staffing resources.

114. The LEA is committed to inclusion. Since its inception, the proportion of pupils with statements has remained relatively stable at about the national average. Its positive and incremental approach to inclusion is reflected in the steady increase in the number of pupils who are educated in mainstream schools, with a proportionate decrease in special schools. A successful inclusion project enabled the transfer of a number of pupils from special to mainstream schools and also resulted in the production of a useful inclusion profile and school self-evaluation checklist.

115. A key part of the SEN strategy is a major special school re-organisation, which has been in process for several years. The delay, which is largely due to circumstances outside the LEA's control, has presented all those involved with considerable challenges that have been managed sensitively and effectively. The LEA has now developed a wide ranging plan based on the re-organisation of its two all-age moderate learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties schools into primary and secondary schools, each catering for a wider range of needs. This is a sensible development that is supported by a clear management plan which identifies responsibilities and deadlines for implementation. A number of key requirements have already been met, such as the appointment of senior management teams for the new schools. There has been a commendable emphasis on training, development and support for the new schools. Funding has enabled shared work on curriculum development and schemes of work. Officers have given effective support for developing the necessary infrastructure and managing the transition. The LEA is actively researching and developing ways of improving the range of SEN provision available and reducing its inherited reliance on placements outside its borders.

Statutory obligations

116. The LEA meets its statutory requirements satisfactorily, with significant strengths and only a few areas of weakness. The completion rate for statements within the 18-week timescale is satisfactory at 84.2 per cent. The LEA is taking appropriate steps to improve its completion rate for statements awaiting advice from other agencies which is currently 70 per cent.

117. The criteria for issuing a statement of SEN, which are also used as a guide for the initiation of a statutory assessment, are now out of date. Schools are not clear about the criteria being applied for statements and the LEA cannot demonstrate its decisions are equitable. However, steps are being taken to improve this: for example, through establishing a moderation group to manage the initiation of assessments and through developing more precise descriptors for assessing requests for statements.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for SEN:

- clarify and publicise the criteria for initiating a statutory assessment and the drawing up of a statement.

118. The quality of the statements scrutinised by HMI is good, with needs clearly identified and appropriate provision quantified. The LEA sets high standards for the management of annual reviews by schools and provides effective support for them. Very good documentation makes clear the requirement for specific information on the use of delegated funding and details of pupils' progress against targets. The quality of the statutory annual review process and its management at both school and LEA level is high. Officers prioritise attendance at review meetings and attend an appropriate number, including a representative sample of out-of-district placements, all of which are monitored before they are agreed.

119. The LEA invests considerable time and expertise liaising with parents and schools on SEN issues. This is reflected in the extremely low level of hearings going to tribunal. On the rare occasions when cases have been heard, the tribunal has found in favour of the LEA.

120. A well-established parent partnership service provides a range of assistance, from direct parental support to training for parents and schools. The quality of the documentation is satisfactory but lacks performance indicators and written quality assurance mechanisms. Although the service is publicised through a number of appropriate media, a focus group of parents that met HMI was not aware of its existence.

School improvement

121. Support for school improvement is very good. A high level of SEN funding is delegated to schools, through clear mechanisms that are effectively monitored. Funding for statements is allocated according to clear criteria and moderated by panels that include headteachers. This funding is reviewed at least annually and straightforward arrangements ensure that allocated funding follows individual pupils promptly, for example through a change of school. The formula for non-statutory SEN funding is similarly clear and the SEN handbook contains concise and helpful

guidance on making effective use of delegated funding. The guidance for moderating Stage 3 of the SEN Code of Practice at Key Stages 1 and 2 is good but that for Key Stages 3 and 4 is now outdated.

122. Regular monitoring visits to schools are thorough and appropriately focused on school improvement. The LEA responds promptly and positively to areas of concern identified through monitoring. It is engaged on a timely and thorough review of SEN funding, having identified key areas for developing inclusion and improving provision. For example, the reliance on proxy indicators for non-statutory funding is rightly being reviewed to ensure that early intervention is as well targeted as possible.

123. A comprehensive and well-presented training programme is available to teaching and support staff and involves a variety of agencies from both within and outside the LEA. There is a very strong commitment to developing the expertise of school and support service staff, with the LEA partly funding a number of externally accredited courses. Equally, the LEA encourages and supports staff to share their SEN expertise, for instance through special school staff becoming leading literacy or numeracy teachers.

124. Target setting for individual pupils is good. Targets are based on individual education plans and are monitored effectively. The LEA has a wealth of data on pupil attainment, which has recently been co-ordinated with the SEN database. P scales are in use in a number of schools, and there has been some useful work on developing descriptor statements based on these. LEA services are able to interrogate the data to track pupil progress and challenge schools where appropriate.

125. The special educational needs support service (SENSS) is of high quality and makes a considerable contribution to raising achievement. The service's funding has been delegated since the inception of the LEA. It has excellent purchasing and quality assurance systems that are tailored to meet the needs of schools. The service sets and meets increasingly challenging targets to assist schools in moving pupils back down the stages in the SEN register. The education psychology service (EPS) is considerably understaffed in comparison with statistical neighbours and the national average. Despite this, its support for school improvement is innovative and of high quality. There is a positive culture of performance management and service improvement throughout the LEA's support for SEN.

Value for money

126. Value for money is good overall. Services such as the EPS and SENSS provide extremely good value for money. The costs of the SENSS are slightly higher than those of other local providers but this is accounted for by the very high level of staff training and expertise. Schools are supplied with details of other providers as required, and the SENSS has established practices that fully conform to Best Value criteria.

127. Total SEN expenditure is roughly in line with statistical neighbours but below the averages for unitary authorities and the nation as a whole. Financial planning in relation to predicted needs is satisfactory overall, although it is insufficient in the area of behaviour support.

128. Financial controls are satisfactory. There are robust systems for monitoring the use of delegated statutory and non-statutory funding, which are supported by a well-established and comprehensive database. However, the area designated as exceptional funding lacks sufficiently clear access criteria and an identified spending limit. The LEA is aware of this and is examining strategies for reducing such funding by identifying more flexible statement banding categories.

129. Expenditure on out-of-LEA placements has risen markedly in the last year, with double the number of pupils placed in these schools. However, the number of pupils is small overall, and there is a positive policy of developing provision within the LEA, with recycling of funding to support this. The out-of-LEA budget is not included in the overall SEN budget, although there are appropriate plans for this to be remedied. When faced with the sudden and unexpected temporary closure of a special school outside its borders, attended by 29 pupils from North Lincolnshire, the LEA managed alternative emergency provision effectively.

130. The LEA is in the early stages of a Best Value review of SEN, focusing on raising attainment through inclusion, and early indications are that this will be a worthwhile, well-managed exercise.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

131. The authority has a clear and effective strategy for school place provision, which aims to ensure that communities are served as far as possible by a local school. Having carefully assessed the options, the LEA decided not to pursue a major reorganisation or school closure programme in the foreseeable future. A working group, involving elected members and other stakeholders, has been proactive in reducing the number of surplus places in primary and secondary schools. The level of surplus places in the primary sector is now close to the national average, a fair achievement given the rural context, and the number of schools with more than 25 per cent surplus capacity has significantly reduced in the last two years. In the secondary sector the number of surplus places is a little above the national average, though projected to reduce in the short term.

132. The authority's community commitment means that there is a higher than average number of small schools. This is the case not only in respect of rural primary schools, where options for closure and further rationalisation are limited, but also within the secondary sector in the urban context of Scunthorpe. These schools generally perform well. However, given the projected decline in secondary numbers in the medium and long term, the authority is right to keep the situation under careful review.

133. Pupil projections have improved in quality and are now within an acceptable margin of error. The LEA is taking appropriate steps to refine the methodology used to produce this data further.

134. The School Organisation Plan is satisfactory and was published on time and in accordance with legislative requirements. The School Organisation committee is working effectively, although it has not yet been tested by any major reorganisation or closure proposal.

Admissions

135. Admissions to schools are managed well. The authority was able to comply with almost all first preferences for entry to primary and junior schools in the current year and 97 per cent on transfer to secondary schools. The comparatively small number of appeals resulting from this process are handled promptly and heard by the end of April each year.

136. Consultation on admissions procedures is conducted in accordance with legislative requirements and an admissions forum is in place, though it has not been required to meet more often than annually. Good links with neighbouring authorities and with the dioceses help the LEA to manage the transfer of pupils across authority boundaries.

137. The authority publishes clear information for parents, which has only minor shortcomings: for example, no guidance is provided for parents on how they might go about choosing a school. Although a one-off consultation exercise with parents was carried out four years ago, there is no regular opportunity for parents to offer feedback on the admissions and appeals process.

Asset management

138. The LEA is making satisfactory progress in developing its asset management plan (AMP). Schools are appropriately involved in the process and the planning group is chaired by a secondary headteacher. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) judged the initial AMP returns to be unsatisfactory, largely owing to unreliable data on condition. This data has now been improved both in terms of accuracy and presentation. Suitability surveys have been carried out effectively by two seconded teachers with the aim of ensuring a consistent approach.

139. The LEA has encouraged schools to link their property management with broader school development planning, although the resulting premises development plans are less clearly linked to LEA objectives. While progress is being made through the construction of a detailed matrix, the methodology for prioritisation of need is not yet fully developed.

140. The LEA has so far been unsuccessful in tackling a backlog of top priority condition work, currently estimated at around £14 million. There is no strategy in place to secure the resources necessary beyond those available through the New Deal for Schools. The issue, therefore, remains unresolved, although the LEA has been proactive in securing funding, for example, for surplus place removal and special needs reorganisation, both of which will impact on the condition backlog. The private finance initiative has also been explored in detail as a means of tackling the LEA's highest priority primary school replacement project, but with no successful outcome.

Recommendation

In order to improve asset management planning:

- develop a robust strategy to secure resources to tackle the accumulated backlog of condition work.

Promoting social inclusion

141. The LEA is making good progress in its support for social inclusion and overall its provision is very sound. Across the access areas, the support varies in quality but is never less than satisfactory. The support for attendance is good and the re-organisation of behaviour support has led to improvements so that it is now satisfactory. The LEA has compiled useful data on the performance of vulnerable groups of pupils and is taking steps to improve its target setting process for these pupils.

142. The LEA's approach to social inclusion is, appropriately, the responsibility of a number of officers who are members of the SEN and social inclusion strategy group. Three education welfare officers (EWO) and a specialist teacher have been appointed for social inclusion work with schools, pupils and families. Sensibly, the LEA also works to combat social exclusion through co-operation with a number of other services and agencies, notably social services. The recent appointment of an assistant director, who spans both the education and social services directorates, is intended to strengthen support for social inclusion further.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

143. The LEA has improved its provision for pupils who have no school place and now has a clear strategy and very sound procedures in place, with few major weaknesses. The schools have been satisfied with the support for pupils who are out of school for reasons other than exclusion but have rightly had concerns, especially in the secondary phase, about alternative provision for excluded pupils. The LEA has responded to these concerns by merging the behaviour support service with the effective special educational needs support service, giving it increased rigour and structure. However, evidence from visits indicates that schools are not yet fully aware of the coherent strategy that now underlies the LEA's provision.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for education otherwise than at school:

- ensure that schools fully understand the strategy for pupils who have no school place.

144. Regular monitoring and recording give the LEA detailed knowledge of all young people who have no school place. The parents of the comparatively few pupils who are educated at home receive helpful guidance and their children's progress is monitored effectively. For sick children, appropriate tuition is continued when they return home from hospital, according to the hours recommended by doctors. The young parents unit provides a suitable curriculum, up to GCSE level, for pregnant girls and young mothers. Currently, they attend for four days weekly and, from January 2002, their tuition will increase to 25 hours.

145. The behaviour support plan contains a clear policy for pupils who are permanently excluded. It places appropriate stress on exclusion as a last resort and on early re-integration. Thirteen of the fourteen secondary schools, encouraged by the LEA, have established units that provide additional support to reduce the likelihood of exclusion for pupils at risk. The LEA's exclusions panel has a monitoring function and meets weekly to consider alternative provision for excluded pupils. All permanent exclusions are considered by governing bodies within the required 15 days and, during that time, the pupils receive at least 15 hours weekly of support for home study. A full-time education welfare officer is responsible for the attendance and welfare of excluded pupils.

146. Alternative school or other provision for excluded pupils is negotiated quickly and a fair distribution of pupils between schools is sought. All the secondary schools participate in a concordat on excluded pupils. This operates satisfactorily but is made more difficult by the unequal incidence of permanent exclusions across schools. The re-entry of each excluded pupil to a school is facilitated by a sound support plan and 15 hours each week of support from a classroom support assistant, trained in behaviour management by the LEA.

147. The primary and secondary pupil referral units have both provided 25 hours of tuition in appropriate subjects for every full-time pupil since September 2001, a year ahead of national requirements. The primary unit caters mainly for Key Stage 2 pupils and the enlarged secondary unit for those in Key Stage 4. Both are chiefly for permanently excluded pupils but may also admit those at risk of falling into this category. While the primary unit normally retains pupils for a maximum of three weeks, the LEA realistically acknowledges the difficulty of re-integrating into school those who are nearing the end of compulsory education. The secondary unit therefore works with a range of partners, including adult and further education, to provide suitable courses that offer accreditation up to and including GCSE.

148. The links between services are good and include a cross-service group that is investigating alternative educational outcomes for disaffected pupils. The LEA has increased its spending on provision for pupils who have no school place to a level above the national average in order to bring about improvements. Its expenditure offers sound value for money.

Attendance

149. Support for attendance is good. The rates of attendance and unauthorised absence are better than the national averages in primary schools and broadly in line with them in secondary schools. Evidence from school visits indicates that targeted initiatives are leading to improvements.

150. The LEA has a good strategy for improving attendance, which is closely linked to raising attainment. The education welfare service (EWS) has produced a helpful document that gives guidance on effective policy and practice and has been discussed with every school. All schools have attendance policies and the quality of their implementation is monitored by the EWS. However, the service rightly stresses that the responsibility for improving attendance lies with the schools in the first instance.

151. A recent report from external auditors described the EWS as lean and efficient. Education welfare officers (EWOs) are sensibly allocated to clusters of primary schools and their associated secondary school. Their time is distributed according to need in relation to clear criteria, agreed in consultation with headteachers. A traded service, to enable schools to purchase additional support if they require it, is being developed. The EWS offers for purchase an effective service that ensures contact with pupils' homes on the first day of absence. Education welfare officers achieve a good balance between individual casework and providing advice to schools and parents. Home visits and prosecutions are used effectively.

152. The LEA faces challenging attendance targets for 2002 but the enhancement of support for vulnerable groups, such as children in public care, has made them attainable. Every school has agreed targets with the EWS and progress towards meeting these will be monitored by link advisers. The service collects and analyses all schools' attendance figures each term and produces reports for council members. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and improvements suggested to schools.

153. Action to improve attendance is co-ordinated effectively across a range of agencies, including health and social services, the police and the Connexions service.

Behaviour Support

154. Schools have been critical of the extent and quality of the LEA's support for behaviour. The LEA has taken steps to improve the service and it is now satisfactory, its strengths outweighing its weaknesses. The absorption of the behaviour support service into the highly-regarded special educational needs support service rightly emphasises the important link between behaviour and learning and has gained the approval of schools.

155. The proportion of permanent exclusions in North Lincolnshire schools is broadly in line with the averages for similar LEAs and the nation as a whole but the rate of fixed-term exclusions is high. The LEA acknowledges that its targets for reducing the rate of exclusions are currently aspirational as, in contrast to academic targets, they are not sufficiently rooted in a rigorous target-setting process with schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- establish with schools a rigorous target-setting process to reduce exclusions and achieve LEA targets.

156. The revised behaviour support plan was produced by a working group of headteachers and officers and is an improvement on the already sound document that preceded it. The plan sets out a clear strategy for tackling issues of challenging behaviour and, sensibly, will be reviewed annually.

157. The LEA rightly seeks to help schools to develop their abilities in behaviour management. Its delegation of behaviour support funds to schools has enabled some to employ their own teaching and support staff. Others choose to purchase part-time support from teachers and classroom assistants employed by the LEA. The evidence from school visits indicates that the quality of LEA support is usually at least satisfactory and is particularly effective when closely linked to support for learning. Schools are also able to purchase help with assessment, advice on pastoral support programmes and an appropriate range of training in behaviour management for newly-qualified teachers, experienced teachers and

support staff. The schools' use of delegated funds for behaviour support is monitored rigorously by the LEA.

158. The LEA has held meetings with headteachers about effective use of the pupil retention grant and is helpfully expanding its guidance. It has supported schools well in making use of the grant to establish units and tracking systems for pupils whose behaviour is challenging, and to provide staff training.

159. Appropriately, a cross-service group is considering alternative curricular provision and outcomes for disaffected pupils. Productive links are being developed with other agencies to reduce disaffection; they include co-operation with the youth service on programmes that help young people to manage their anger and build their self-esteem. The LEA's anti-bullying project involves working effectively with professionals, parents and pupils. It has established liaison teachers in almost every school and trained peer mentors in most secondary schools.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

160. The LEA meets its statutory obligations and makes good provision for health, safety, welfare and child protection.

161. For health and safety, the education service looks to the authority's corporate safety unit. The responsible education officer liaises with the unit's staff regularly but the schools also have direct access to the unit. Schools receive a core service, which they may enhance by purchasing additional support according to their needs. The unit monitors annually the extent to which equipment is being maintained to satisfactory standards. It provides training and advice to governing bodies, for example on compiling health and safety policies. Other support includes site inspections, risk assessments and monitoring the health and safety of employees. The council was awarded the gold occupational health award of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents in 2001.

162. There are currently 80 children on the child protection register. The authority adopts a multi-agency approach that has recently introduced a common assessment form to enable early intervention and so reduce the need for registration. Schools are receiving appropriate training in the use of the form. The education welfare service maintains an up-to-date list of children in every school who are on the register. All schools have child protection co-ordinators, whose names and involvement in training are recorded. The training for co-ordinators is thorough and updated at least annually. They receive a resource pack to help them train colleagues. Schools also receive a very helpful file of up-to-date, practical guidance. Appropriate guidelines on staff facing allegations have been produced for headteachers. The LEA carried out an audit of schools' policies in 2000.

Children in public care

163. North Lincolnshire is developing good procedures for the support of children in public care, working to a suitable implementation plan that was introduced

in April 2001. The current provision is satisfactory, although there are some weaknesses.

164. North Lincolnshire looks after about 150 children aged five and over. Their attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4 is broadly in line with or better than that found nationally. However, the proportion of children in public care who are excluded is well above average, even though actual numbers are relatively small. Rightly, the EDP and behaviour support plan give priority to the improvement of attainment, exclusion rates and attendance for children in public care. The LEA has good data on children in public care but performance targets have been insufficiently specific and have not been consistent across relevant plans.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for children in public care:

- ensure that targets for raising the achievement of children in public care are specific and consistent across plans.

165. The productive working relationship between education and social services has led to an agreed joint approach to supporting children in public care. The implementation plan is overseen by a steering group that includes headteachers and reports to the education/social services liaison group. Effective initiatives include joint training for teachers and foster carers. An education welfare officer has specific responsibility for children in public care. A clear and comprehensive joint protocol has been developed in consultation with schools. All have adopted it, and it has helpfully been included in governor training. All but three schools have a designated teacher for children in public care. Most have been trained, and the programme will be completed, ahead of schedule, by the end of 2001. However, the LEA has been slow in putting personal education plans in place.

166. Positive relationships and strong communication networks exist within the LEA to support children in public care. The schools visited during the inspection are confident that they are kept well informed by the relevant services about admissions and changes of status of children in public care.

167. Elected members understand and accept their corporate responsibility to promote the educational achievement of children in their care. They receive regular reports, fund the support appropriately and visit children's homes. Groups of members consult regularly with children and carers.

Minority ethnic children

168. The LEA's support for minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers, is sound. The LEA's consortium arrangements with other local authorities is working satisfactorily. Improvements to the Travellers' support service are being implemented following a review in May 2000.

169. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils is significantly lower than the national figure, but the level of support is above that found nationally and in similar

authorities. The majority of minority ethnic pupils attend a small number of schools in the Scunthorpe area.

170. The attainment of minority ethnic pupils compares well with that of all pupils in the authority and good progress is being made towards achieving performance targets.

171. The administration of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) is satisfactory. With the exception of Travellers' children, data collected and analysed by the LEA for minority ethnic pupils are of a very good standard. Additional assessment information is also collected and analysed by the bilingual support service. These data are very useful to schools with pupils for whom English is an additional language. Prompt teacher assessment of all new Travellers' children in LEA schools, together with visits to unauthorised Traveller sites, are also contributing to progress in this area.

172. The LEA has a satisfactory range of policies relating to bilingualism and the revised EDP contains appropriate actions to support minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers. Links with the national strategies in literacy and numeracy are clear and well focused on the needs of minority ethnic pupils. Progress against the identified activities is satisfactory.

173. Although the LEA has not applied the principles of Best Value to its support services for minority ethnic pupils, it is aware of the need to achieve value for money and cost effectiveness in its support for these pupils in schools. The review of the Travellers' service in May 2000 contains some useful evaluative comments, but stops short of applying the four principles of Best Value to the service as a whole.

Gifted and talented children

174. Overall, support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory but there are some weaknesses. There are a number of effective initiatives which benefit gifted and talented pupils but the LEA has yet to develop a strategic overview to support work in this area.

175. The LEA has made a sound start in its support for gifted pupils in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. It has successfully worked with schools to establish a number of summer schools in English, mathematics and science for more able pupils and is committed to developing this work further. There have also been some useful contributions for more able pupils from two secondary schools and a sixth form college in technology, information technology and creative and performing arts. The LEA's music service provides some funding for pupils who have achieved grade eight with distinction in music and encourages pupils to join both regional and national orchestras.

176. While each of these initiatives is appropriate, the LEA's overall approach to its support for gifted and talented pupils is piecemeal. The EDP includes a range of activities supporting gifted and talented pupils but there is as yet no overall strategic plan that ensures that the needs of these pupils are met at each key stage

and across the full curriculum. The LEA has yet to carry out a full audit of current provision in schools for gifted and talented pupils. Similarly, most of the schools visited could refer to individual initiatives but very few had clear criteria to identify gifted and talented pupils or policies to ensure coherent provision.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils:

- audit current provision for gifted and talented pupils and develop a coherent strategy with schools for supporting them.

Measures to combat racism

177. The LEA's measures to combat racism are satisfactory overall but there are some important weaknesses.

178. North Lincolnshire responded appropriately to the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence through its racism awareness group, which is widely representative of schools and relevant services. It produced, albeit slowly, a good anti-racism policy and helpful guidance for schools. This advice has been welcomed and schools visited during the inspection have developed their own policies, either as discrete documents or as additions to broader policies such as equal opportunities. However, most were unsure as to how the Commission for Race Equality local government standards were being applied and monitored by the LEA, even though they are made explicit in the LEA's documentation.

179. Schools have been required to submit a report to the LEA on all racist incidents since February 2001 but none have so far been received. As the LEA has dropped its original intention to require nil returns termly, it cannot be sure whether the absence of reports is due to a lack of incidents or to such occurrences not being reported. However, it has compensated to an extent by including monitoring of racist incidents and anti-racism policies in schools' annual reviews.

Recommendation

In order to improve the measures to combat racism:

- require schools to report an absence of racist incidents by submitting nil returns at the end of each term.

180. Belatedly, anti-racism training has been made available in the current academic year but at the time of the inspection no secondary school representatives had taken it up. Training is also provided for classroom support assistants through the parent partnership. Other effective initiatives to counter racism include the agreed syllabus for religious education and the work of the bi-lingual service. The authority has a sound equal opportunities and employment policy.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

The LEA should give priority to implementing the following recommendations.

In order to improve the measures to combat racism:

- require schools to report an absence of racist incidents by submitting nil returns at the end of each term.

In order to improve corporate planning:

- clarify the criteria for deciding on priorities for scrutiny and the relationship between the scrutiny and Best Value review processes; and
- ensure that all service plans include detailed action plans and strategies for monitoring development targets.

The LEA should also address the following recommendations in its action plan.

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, intervention and support:

- ensure schools are clear about which visits by advisers are paid for from the SLA and which are paid for from centrally retained funding.

In order to support governors more effectively:

- notes of visits relating to school improvement issues should routinely be copied to chairs of governors.

In order to improve support for SEN:

- clarify and publicise the criteria for initiating a statutory assessment and the drawing up of a statement.

In order to improve asset management planning:

- develop a robust strategy to secure resources to tackle the accumulated backlog of condition work.

In order to improve provision for education otherwise than at school:

- ensure that schools fully understand the strategy for pupils who have no school place.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- establish with schools a rigorous target-setting process to reduce exclusions and achieve LEA targets.

In order to improve support for children in public care:

- ensure that targets for raising the achievement of children in public care are specific and consistent across plans.

In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils:

- audit current provision for gifted and talented pupils and develop a coherent strategy with schools for supporting them.

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