



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
LINCOLNSHIRE
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

January 2003

Lead Inspector: Aelwyn Pugh HMI

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

CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1-5
COMMENTARY	6-12
 SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	13-17
Performance	18-24
Funding	25-26
Council structure	27-29
The LEA strategy for school improvement	30-33
The allocation of resources to priorities	34-36
Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value	40-44
 SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement	45-48
Monitoring, challenge and intervention	49-52
The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need	53-56
The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools and using performance data	57-60
The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools	61-63
Support for literacy and numeracy	64
Support for information and communication technology (ICT)	65-72
Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3	73-76
Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers	77
Support for gifted and talented pupils	78-81
Support for school management	82-85
Support to governors	86-89
The effectiveness of services to support school management	90-99
The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	100-104
 SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	
Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision	105-106
 SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION	
The strategy to promote social inclusion	107-111
The supply of school places	112-116
Admissions	117

Asset management	118-119
Provision of education for pupils who have no school place	120-126
Attendance	127
Behaviour support	128-130
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	131-133
Looked after children	134-135
Measures to combat racism	136

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues	137
Corporate planning	138-144
Decision making	145-148
Leadership of officers and elected members	149-155
Partnership	156

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Lincolnshire local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* (December 2001), which focuses on the effectiveness of LEAs' work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in June 2000.

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 discussion with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 53 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's self-evaluation.

3. The inspection considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in schools and provides value for money.

4. Inspection judgements, converted into numerical grades, are used in the comprehensive performance assessment profile for the education service. The Audit Commission published the assessments for each upper tier council on 12 December 2002. The judgements from this inspection will be incorporated into the proposed subsequent annual update of the education service scores.

5. Some of the grades are used in the comprehensive performance assessment profile for the education service. It is intended that the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) for education will be updated annually so the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

COMMENTARY

6. Lincolnshire is one of the largest and one of the most sparsely populated counties in England. Despite relatively high employment, there are areas of considerable social and economic disadvantage, particularly in the larger towns. Many of the rural communities, especially in the south-east and along the coastal strip, are very isolated. This contributes to the high percentage of small primary and secondary schools. In most of the county, the selective system is in operation, but some areas, such as the City of Lincoln, have comprehensive schools. Standards in the county's schools are mainly in line with or above averages nationally and for similar authorities. Attendance rates compare well with schools in similar LEAs, but recently there has been a rise in the number of pupils excluded from school.

7. The authority gives strong support to developing schools' autonomy through a high level of delegation of funds. At the time of the first inspection, in June 2000, the authority had entered into a strategic partnership with an external provider of management services. Building on this, it has recently entered into a second strategic partnership to support school improvement, a move that has been much welcomed by schools. For some years, it has retained only a small amount of funding centrally, although retained funding for school improvement has recently increased considerably, in order to address weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. The LEA has made a positive start in using a Private Finance Initiative project to reorganise schools and has encouraged schools to apply for specialist status. It has also helped forge stronger links between schools, through imaginative schemes such as the rural and coastal academies.

8. These developments have contributed to the improvements made since the last inspection. Progress is particularly evident in the LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention, which is now highly satisfactory, having previously been a weakness of the authority. Most of the authority's functions are now performed at a satisfactory or highly satisfactory level, with particular strengths in the following areas:

- promotion of continuous improvement;
- support for raising standards in literacy and numeracy;
- leadership of services to support school improvement;
- value for money of services to support school improvement; and
- quality of leadership by senior officers.

9. However, the following weaknesses remain:

- financial services;
- services for information and communication technology (ICT) in school administration;
- the speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision making; and
- quality of leadership given by elected members.

10. The county council was recently involved in considerable political turmoil, which led to the publication of a highly critical public interest report by the external

auditor. The situation has now stabilised. However, coming at a stage when the council was also moving into a modernised system of governance, it consumed a considerable amount of elected members' time and energies. This slowed the process of decision making, especially on more controversial issues, such as the review of small schools. Through this period, the main responsibility for leadership fell on the shoulders of senior officers. The director of education's leadership, in particular, has been very good.

11. In two years, the overall effectiveness of the LEA has improved considerably. Unsatisfactory in 2000, it is now highly satisfactory. Of the services re-inspected, approximately half have improved. In most cases this improvement has been substantial, from weak to highly satisfactory or better.

12. The leadership of officers, the vision of the director, the aspirations of the authority to develop its technology further, and the structures and partnerships which have been put in place mean that Lincolnshire has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. The context of the LEA has not changed greatly since the last inspection. Lincolnshire is the fourth largest county in England. It is also one of the most sparsely populated, with approximately 634,000 residents, about half of whom live outside the main towns of Lincoln, Grantham and Boston. It has the highest population growth in England, mainly in the number of older people. The proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups is low, at less than one per cent.

14. Farming, food processing, tourism and manufacturing dominate the economy and there is a heavy reliance on semi-skilled and unskilled labour. Therefore, although unemployment (2.5 per cent) is below the national average, wage levels are low. Lincolnshire has a significant number of armed forces personnel (2.13 per cent, compared with a national average of 0.55 per cent). The proportion of the population in the higher social classes is in line with the national average.

15. There are 101,340 pupils in the authority's schools. The proportion of pupils under five on the roll of mainstream schools is above the national average and the proportion of pupils over 16 in secondary schools is well above average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) is in line with the national average. There is high pupil turnover in some schools, especially those near air force bases. In 2000/2001, for example, 14 of the 289 primary schools admitted over 15 per cent additional pupils during the year.

16. School provision is largely unaltered since the 2000 inspection. There are five nursery schools, 289 primary, 15 grammar, 13 comprehensive, one secondary bilateral, 34 secondary modern, 19 special schools and four pupil referral units. Through a Private Finance Initiative, the primary school structure in Sleaford has been reorganised and four new day-schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are to be opened in Lincoln, Grantham and Spilsby. Since the last inspection, 18 secondary schools have achieved specialist status, making a total of 21, and a further 26 secondary schools are in the process of bidding for this.

17. As a result of rural isolation, especially in South Holland and the coastal strip, and deliberate council policy, Lincolnshire has a large number of small schools. Thirty-one secondary schools have fewer than 600 pupils and seven have fewer than 300. As part of its response, the authority has already established a 'rural academy', whereby colleges, secondary, primary and special schools in the south-east are linked through information and communication technology. Plans are well in hand to open a 'coastal academy' in 2003.

Performance

18. The last inspection found results in Lincolnshire schools in line with, or above, the national averages and averages for statistical neighbours (authorities with similar

socio-economic circumstances).¹ However, there was significant variability in the performance of schools.

19. The analysis of data in the statistical profile for the LEA shows results for reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 to be above the national average and in line with statistical neighbours. At Key Stage 2, they are in line with national and statistical neighbour averages.

20. At Key Stage 3, results for English are in line with national and statistical neighbour averages. In mathematics and science, they are above national averages and in line with those for statistical neighbours. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is above the national average and in line with statistical neighbours.

21. Attainment at age 18 is above national and statistical neighbour averages for pupils gaining two or more Advanced levels or equivalent qualifications. Furthermore, the percentage gaining fewer than two Advanced levels is in line with statistical neighbours and above the national average.

22. While standards are in line with or above average, rates of improvement and progress between key stages are more variable. At Key Stage 1, the rate of improvement is below the national average. At Key Stage 2, it is in line with the average in English and science, but below in mathematics and, at Key Stage 3, it is average in English, but below in mathematics and science. Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is below average and, between Key Stages 2 and 3, above average. Progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is average, except for higher attaining pupils who make less than average progress.

23. Attendance at both primary and secondary level is above the national average and in line with the average for similar authorities. Exclusion rates in primary and secondary schools in 2000/2001 were in line with national and statistical neighbour averages. In the last academic year, however, there was an increase in exclusions in both phases.

24. The percentage of good or very good primary and secondary schools is in line with the average for schools nationally, but below that for statistical neighbours. In the case of primary schools inspected twice, the percentage that were very good has almost doubled. In secondary schools, however, the percentage that were very good or good has remained the same from one cycle to the next, although the proportion in need of much improvement has fallen. There has been a sharp reduction in the number of schools requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses.

Funding

25. The education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Lincolnshire (£2,586 per primary pupil and £3,310 per secondary pupil) is relatively low. It is eight per

¹ Lincolnshire's statistical neighbours are: Norfolk, Somerset, East Riding, Cornwall, Northamptonshire, Devon, North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Worcestershire and Suffolk.

cent below the national average, close to the county average and slightly above that for its statistical neighbours.

26. Some areas of the county have been granted additional investment funds from the European Union, some of which will benefit education services. The LEA does not benefit from Excellence in Cities or other enhanced funding for deprived areas, although it is included in the Excellence Clusters initiative. The LEA takes up its full Standards Fund allocation. In 2001/2002, this was the equivalent of £209 per pupil, which is slightly below the county average of £220 and well below the England average of £282.

Council structure

27. Lincolnshire County Council has 77 councillors (49 Conservative, 21 Labour, 4 Liberal Democrat and 3 Independent members). Apart from a period of four years in the mid-nineties, it has been controlled by the Conservative group. Since June 2002, the council has operated a leader and cabinet structure with a ten-member executive. There are nine committees, each of which performs both an overview and scrutiny function, four regulatory committees and a committee to monitor standards of conduct.

28. The director of education and cultural services is supported by three assistant directors. The council has entered into strategic partnerships with two private companies. The first, established in 2000, includes all of the support functions for the council, including finance, ICT, personnel, property and catering. It also supplies these services, on the council's behalf, to schools which choose to buy them. The second partnership was established more recently and focuses specifically on providing school improvement services for the LEA. The head of client services and the head of school improvement services from the partnerships work closely with council officers and are members of the departmental management team responsible for strategic decisions.

29. Recently, the council was the subject of a highly critical public interest report from the external auditor. This absorbed a considerable amount of elected members' time. Since then, there has been a change of leader of the council, although Conservative control has been maintained.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

30. The last inspection judged the first Education Development Plan (EDP1) as low-cost, with several positive features, but also some weaknesses. The priorities related well to a comprehensive audit, but some success criteria for actions were insufficiently precise. Not all schools were making effective use of EDP1 as part of their own planning processes.

31. The LEA now has a highly satisfactory strategy for school improvement. On the basis of its review of EDP1, the authority has identified clearly those areas needing further development and has integrated these appropriately into its second Education Development Plan (EDP2), which represents a significant improvement on

its predecessor. It is a sound plan with several good aspects and focuses clearly on the five national priorities:

- raising attainment in the early years and in primary education;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 3;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 4;
- narrowing the attainment gap/tackling underachievement; and
- supporting schools causing concern.

It also includes one local priority:

- improving recruitment, retention and continuing professional development for all teaching and non-teaching staff.

32. The EDP2 is based on appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders and an audit that draws on a good range of pertinent data. It analyses strengths and weaknesses for each national priority clearly and succinctly and presents convincing reasons for the selection of the one local priority. Intended outcomes are clearly quantified and timed, and activities are explicitly related to other relevant plans. There is a good range of activities to address the local priority, and special educational needs and social inclusion issues are addressed appropriately. The strategy for monitoring and evaluation is clear. The analyses conducted to date show that the LEA is making highly satisfactory progress in implementing its school improvement strategy.

33. Targets for 2004 are in line with Government targets and, through the public service agreement, have been further raised by one per cent. They are appropriately demanding, but considerable improvement in test results is required if the very challenging Key Stage 2 English and mathematics targets are to be met.

The allocation of resources to priorities

34. Allocation of resources to priorities is satisfactory. The council has maintained its commitment to fund education at just above the SSA, but £11.7 million of the available revenue budget is spent as capital. This reduces the actual revenue budget to 97.5 per cent of SSA. The LEA has consistently directed its resources toward its declared priorities. These include: supporting small schools and those with small sixth forms, to promote viable rural communities; retaining a selective system and parental choice of schools; directing resources toward front-line services; and not incurring unnecessary debt. It has met all government targets for passing on SSA increases to schools and for the proportion of the schools' budget that is delegated. For some years, it has retained only small levels of revenue funding centrally and currently delegates 88 per cent of the local schools budget, one of the highest proportions among counties. Budgets for strategic management, school improvement and special educational needs are well below national and county averages. Retained funding for school improvement was increased significantly in 2001/2002, in order to address weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report, but it remains below average. Spending on school transport is high, reflecting the rural nature of the county. Overall expenditure on SEN as a proportion of the local schools' budget is low (11.6 per cent, compared with a county

average of 14.5 per cent). Within this, spending on special schools and independent special schools places is above average. Home to school transport expenditure is high, reflecting the LEA's commitment to parental choice for parents of children with special educational needs. By contrast, resources devoted to supporting the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools are limited. The council has been pro-active in seeking additional funding and has succeeded in attracting £37 million from a variety of sources over a period of five years. This will mainly support heritage and community education projects that will enhance and broaden the reach of education. Support is also available to schools to pursue external funding bids and to seek specialist status.

35. The local schools budget for primary schools (at £2,436 per pupil) is well below the county average (£2,740) and that for secondary schools (£3,564 per pupil) is 2.5 per cent above the county average (£3,476). This reflects, in part, the cost of supporting the county's small secondary schools. The LEA has a relatively straightforward school funding formula. It provides a single lump sum to each school, depending on phase, and allocates the main portion of funds according to age-weighted pupil numbers. This ensures that small schools receive funding to maintain a basic management infra-structure. The formula also includes smaller elements for SEN and pupil turnover. An element to meet additional educational needs in secondary schools was introduced this year for the first time. At £250,000 (£5.30 per secondary pupil), this is relatively small, although it does begin to acknowledge need. Within the formula, there is an overall weighting toward the secondary sector. Within this, there is a greater than usual weighting toward sixth form students and Key Stage 3 relative to other key stages, and relatively less weighting toward Key Stage 4. These weightings do not reflect the need to address the low rates of improvement from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. Nor do they reflect the high costs of delivering the Key Stage 4 curriculum; costs which are likely to increase further in the light of recent Department for Education and Skills (DfES) recommendations for broadening the curriculum at that stage. Relative weightings between key stages have remained constant for the past three years. Overall, the formula enables all but the very smallest schools to continue without recourse to an additional small school supplement.

36. The education capital programme has grown rapidly in recent years, from £12.2 million in 1999/2000 to £34.3 million in 2002/2003. This has been invested in the improvement of school buildings. The council has been reluctant to borrow funds and, to date, has funded this growth from capital grants and capital receipts; also by using revenue funds to pay for capital items. This year it has budgeted £11 million, 3.5 per cent of its education revenue budget, or £113 per pupil, for use in this way. This is too much because it has an adverse effect on the revenue funds delegated to schools.

Recommendations

In order to secure maximum benefit to schools from available revenue funding:

- reduce the proportion of the schools' capital programme that is funded from revenue allocations.

In order to ensure that the funding formula reflects the relative costs of delivering the curriculum and addresses specific needs:

- give greater weighting to pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4; and
- increase the funding provision for pupils with additional educational needs.

37. Consultation with schools over budget matters has improved significantly in recent years, but schools are not well informed about the corporate context of the council's budget setting and the wider pressures that it is facing. There are regular meetings between headteachers and senior officers, with senior councillors sometimes in attendance. The meetings of the schools' funding group, where revisions to the formula and other funding issues are considered, are open to all headteachers. Plans are in place to establish a schools' forum, as required by recent legislation.

38. Budget-making processes for centrally retained education budgets are sound. In-year variations in planned expenditure are contained within the overall budget for the service. There was some disruption to budget monitoring capacity during 2000/2001 while a new financial management system was being installed, but problems have been resolved and budget monitoring is now effective. There has been overspending on the transport budget, but the situation has improved and the council is rightly embarking on a Best Value review of all its transport services, in order to increase efficiency further in this area.

39. The LEA has good arrangements to monitor school budget surpluses and deficits and it responds appropriately. However, when schools do not initiate prompt and effective remedial action, it has not been consistently assertive in its follow up. This has led to a small number of schools building up large deficits that have then needed painful budget adjustments in order to rectify them.

Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value

40. The LEA has good arrangements to secure Best Value and continuous improvement. The council's Best Value Performance Plan was given unqualified approval by the external auditor. Performance indicators are monitored and reported on regularly. Most of the functions within the education and cultural services directorate have now been subjected to Best Value review. Progress with improvement plans is regularly monitored at departmental management team meetings and in meetings between the director and the chief executive.

41. Further reviews, based on Best Value principles, have been drivers for major changes. A follow-up review of monitoring and intervention in schools led directly to a recommendation to seek an external partner to provide school improvement services. Several successful cross-cutting reviews have been led by an external consultant to provide more rigorous external challenge. These include corporate parenting, family support services, child protection and services for disabled children. These all draw attention to a lack of consistency and duplication between education, health and social services. A start has been made on revising working practices to ensure more collaboration between services and a greater focus on users' needs. The children's services manager from social services sits on the education directorate management team, to enable more effective joint working.

42. The management of the two strategic partnerships is based on the achievement of a large number of key performance indicators. These are monitored regularly, as part of the contract monitoring process. This practice has now spread to other areas of the council. There is regular reporting of performance to councillors, although they do not use this information to provide rigorous challenge.

43. Guidance on Best Value has been circulated to schools and their plans for Best Value are monitored appropriately. The LEA is proposing to use a series of Best Value reviews to address the issue of small schools.

44. The LEA's self-assessment, prepared by the director of education prior to this inspection, reflects detailed, analytical thinking and an objective assessment of the present situation of the LEA, which accords closely with the view of the inspection team. The self-assessment in itself provides a good basis for future planning.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

45. The work of the school improvement services was the major weakness at the time of the previous inspection. Several key functions, such as support for curriculum ICT and support for school managers, were performed unsatisfactorily or worse. The LEA's structure for monitoring and challenging schools and for supporting under-performing schools was poor. The value for money given by the LEA was unsatisfactory.

46. In two years, the LEA has worked hard to remedy each of these weaknesses, and has largely succeeded. The only functions now unsatisfactory are financial support and the support for administrative ICT. The structure within which schools are challenged and supported is now considerably clearer. The LEA made most of the changes for itself over the two years, but the strategic partner, operating on the authority's behalf, has also made additional improvements very recently.

47. Schools now have a secure system of support and challenge, based on meeting their identified needs. Link inspectors co-ordinate much of this work, but other LEA teams, such as those concerned with inclusion, also provide information and support. Systems for priority support, through the national strategies or EDP2 activities, are clear and provision for traded support is growing. The strategic deployment of staff is increasingly proportionate to schools' needs. The rapid improvements that have been made, and the degree of secure planning undertaken, indicate that the quality of leadership in school improvement work over the last two years has been good and, according to early indications, continues to be good in the new arrangements. The strategic partner has an extensive range of procedures, designed to ensure that there is high reliability in the support that it gives to schools.

48. The quality of LEA services is rising. This has been achieved against a background of a below average level of funding for education and very low retention by the authority of school improvement funding. The LEA thus provides good value for money.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

49. The previous inspection found that the LEA's strategy for monitoring and intervention in schools had important weaknesses, including a lack of support for school self-evaluation. Following this, the LEA made rapid progress on its policy and procedures, and its strategic partner has continued this work. The strategy is now satisfactory.

50. The LEA has had a long-established procedure by which the quality of each school was reviewed three times a year by link inspectors and senior officers, and schools causing concern were placed in one of three categories. However, it is apparent from discussions with headteachers that, even as recently as two years ago, some schools were not always clear which category, if any, they were in. The system improved markedly last year when the authority published its system of using information, such as trends in pupils' standards, to identify weaknesses. Where the

LEA has a concern, the director of education now writes to the headteacher and chair of governing body of the school to inform them of the nature of this concern.

51. The authority has since progressed to a more sophisticated approach, widely welcomed by schools, which puts greater emphasis on schools' own self-evaluation while retaining a firm element of monitoring and final judgement by the LEA. This new strategy has been developed and introduced by the strategic partner and all headteachers and chairs of governing bodies have been consulted and briefed on its operation and implications. The review process was just beginning at the time of this inspection, but early indications are of successful implementation. Sensibly, the LEA intends to review its operation after one term.

52. Good guidance has been given to schools about the scope and nature of the self-evaluation expected of them, and the LEA's role in moderating schools' judgements. However, although the focus on school performance and improvement is admirably clear, the process lacks agreed standards of performance on which schools can base their self-evaluation, and there is a danger that different schools might interpret similar evidence too variably. Moreover, schools are unclear whether or not the LEA retains a system of triggers for intervention. In fact, alongside the moderated self-review, the LEA continues to run a scheme through which the school improvement service, and other teams within the authority, review key indicators regularly and raise the alert if there is a cause for concern about a school. This is a sound system, although key indicators have not yet been devised by all services concerned.

Recommendation

In order to clarify schools' use of moderated self-review:

- after further consultation with schools, introduce a more standardised system for identifying strengths and weaknesses in schools' provision and performance.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

53. This aspect of the LEA's work was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection because the operation of policy was inconsistent. It has improved significantly and is now highly satisfactory.

54. In September 2002, the LEA introduced a moderated school self-review process. After discussion with schools, it has placed each of them into one of five categories. Support is allocated according to need, based on an evaluation of performance and other data. The most successful schools have been allocated only an annual visit, concerned with moderating the self-review and agreeing targets. The better amongst them are being encouraged to seek LEA accreditation as an example of good practice that can be disseminated to others. The next two categories of school have been allocated a little more monitoring, and the final two categories now receive targeted support, governed by an agreed action plan. This system links to the intensive support provided through the national strategies and can be triggered

by concern raised by a particular section within the LEA. This is a sound arrangement.

55. Over and above the system for supporting or intervening in particular schools, the authority's EDP work focuses well on issues of relative concern across the authority. The LEA is moving towards an emphasis on geographical areas that need special support, such as those within the scope of the rural and coastal academies, and it is supporting a large number of local and cross-authority school partnerships that focus on particular aspects of school improvement. It has also analysed performance data well to identify which groups of pupils are progressing best in which types of school, though it has not yet made a strategic response to this analysis.

56. The authority has delegated a high proportion of its funding for school improvement to schools. Their use of this funding to purchase the LEA's traded support has reduced in recent years, but the strategic partner is currently developing a broader range of services to schools than the LEA was previously able to supply, including a brokerage of accredited external providers. Through these means, the LEA is able to help schools to help themselves, while retaining sufficient capacity to intervene where necessary.

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

57. This aspect of work was poor at the time of the previous inspection, primarily because of inadequate use of performance data. It has improved significantly and is now highly satisfactory.

58. The performance management section of the LEA now regularly provides good information. An annual data-pack, produced for each school, provides useful information about its performance, based on the progress made by each pupil. All schools are compared with similar schools, and most have been willing to share information. The analysis of key stage performance data is timely, but problems experienced nationally have resulted in the late delivery of Year 7 data to secondary schools.

59. Schools have been trained in the use of the annual data pack and its function within the moderated self-review. The benchmarking of a school's performance against its comparators rightly forms an important part of the LEA's assessment of each school. The LEA produces indicative targets for every school, based on the progress that pupils make nationally, and its desire to meet its own targets agreed with the DfES. Link inspectors then discuss the realism of these targets with headteachers, taking into account the performance of individual pupils. Some headteachers have found this process too rigid, but the LEA has generally equipped schools to engage in a realistic dialogue with the link inspector.

60. The LEA now has an improved knowledge of its schools. The strategic partner has developed a useful management information system, which is used by link inspectors to collate data about each school. This has the potential to be a significant improvement on the previous system where link inspectors' records of

crucial discussions with schools about targets were sometimes too scant. However, this system has yet to be extended to encompass information from all sections of the LEA.

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

61. This aspect of work was poor at the time of the last inspection. A relatively high proportion of schools required special measures or had serious weaknesses, and the LEA's own processes for identifying schools needing support were not transparent. The authority has significantly improved in effectiveness and is now highly satisfactory. The LEA itself undertook much of this improvement, but the work of the strategic partner has developed it further.

62. The proportion of schools requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses has reduced sharply and is now below the national average. In general, schools have been removed from these categories within a satisfactory time. A major factor in this has been the very effective work done by the LEA's school improvement officers, who are highly appreciated by the schools with whom they have worked. These officers have co-operated closely with schools in developing and implementing their action plans and have given strong and beneficial support to school managers and governors. The progress of schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses is monitored effectively by the link inspector and evaluated regularly by a senior officer. Reports on these schools are made regularly to elected members.

63. It is clear from discussions with headteachers, and other evidence, that, in the past, the authority did not always recognise or intervene sufficiently early to arrest some schools' decline. The new procedures of evidence-based monitoring and review, however, are very likely to cause the authority to identify weaknesses sooner. The LEA has clear documentation on schools that it has itself identified as a cause for concern and has produced brief action plans for support and, where relevant, sensible exit strategies. The number of schools identified by the LEA as requiring priority support has been reduced greatly since the last inspection and identification procedures are now more focused.

Support for literacy and numeracy

64. Support for literacy and numeracy was previously good and the LEA's analysis indicates that this continues to be the case. No fieldwork was conducted in these areas, but documentation provided by the authority and other information gives clear support to the LEA's evaluation.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

65. The previous inspection found the support for the use of ICT in the curriculum to be very poor. Schools were receiving inadequate support and weak progress was being made in implementing the National Grid for Learning initiative. The LEA has made significant progress since then, and its curriculum provision is now highly satisfactory.

66. The council has ambitious corporate plans to create a common high-speed network, servicing all schools and other public bodies. The authority has already exceeded its National Grid for Learning broadband connection target, with 21 per cent of schools connected so far. This proportion is planned to increase to 35 per cent by the end of the financial year. Nearly all schools are connected to the internet through the council's network. In theory, this gives them access to a growing range of curriculum support material and local examples of good practice. However, the unreliability of the network has detracted from the effectiveness of its use.

67. The ratio of computers to pupils across the authority is better than the national average and, in two thirds of schools, has met government targets. The LEA is rightly directing funding towards the schools with fewer computers, to bring them up to the level of the others. The provision of laptop computers for teachers has begun and, so far, most schools have chosen the LEA's customised model.

68. The quality of learning in ICT across the county is broadly in line with national averages, as is the proportion of 14 year-olds assessed as reaching the nationally expected level. Nevertheless, the authority rightly gives particular support to schools where provision is weak or standards low. Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number of ICT consultants and schools indicate that the advice they give is good and sometimes excellent. The authority is now giving support to secondary teachers in moderating their assessment of pupils' standards and has supported the introduction of a new GCSE course.

69. The LEA has fulfilled its role in supporting the implementation of New Opportunities Fund training. Almost all teachers have now signed up for this training, and the completion rate is above the national average. The authority has supplemented this through a useful range of courses and documentation of its own, partly arising out of its analysis of schools' external inspection reports. Recent outreach support to small schools, through mobile training units with wireless links to the Internet, is proving useful.

70. The previous inspection found support for administrative ICT to be poor. It has improved, but is still unsatisfactory. The majority of schools have a single integrated computer network, while about one third have dual networks, with separate administrative and curriculum servers. However, many schools report difficulties in establishing regular and speedy access to the system.

71. As part of its strategic service partnership, the council has introduced an integrated business management software package that includes finance, payroll, personnel, and stock ordering. The distribution of this package to schools is nearly complete, but problems have arisen because of a lack of capacity in school and computer and data networks.

72. Electronic communication between the LEA and schools is effective, but telephone support has been unreliable. Recently, the separate help desks for curriculum and administrative support were merged, in order to provide an integrated service. This has started to improve response times and, together with the engagement of a small team of peripatetic technicians in some parts of the county, is leading to an improved service. For school-specific administrative tasks, such as

attendance and assessment, the LEA has supported two proprietary software packages. The pupil database is now operating effectively, but some schools report continuing difficulties with the assessment module because of its complexity.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

73. This aspect was not inspected previously. The LEA is making highly satisfactory use of the new national strategy to support the raising of standards at Key Stage 3. An experienced strategy manager and a team of well-regarded consultants have been appointed. There is a clear action plan for implementing the strategy. This relates appropriately to EDP2 and to the authority's plans for raising standards at Key Stage 2 and supporting gifted and talented pupils.

74. Teachers are very complimentary about the advice and help provided by the consultants on adapting nationally produced training and support materials to the specific needs of schools, particularly small secondary schools. All schools receive a basic level of consultancy and focused use is being made of performance data to target additional support on underachieving pupils and departments. Appropriate use is being made of advanced skills teachers to help disseminate good practice. However, the use of leading teachers and leading departments has proved less successful and this aspect of the programme is now rightly being reviewed.

75. Schools are receiving increasing support in developing cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning, particularly through the foundation strand. However, delays in the transfer of data from the primary to the secondary phase have prevented some secondary schools from giving timely, informed support to Year 7 pupils.

76. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is in line with or above national and statistical neighbour averages and progress between Key Stages 2 and 3 is above average. However, it is too early to assess the impact of the Key Stage 3 strategy on standards.

Support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers

77. This aspect of the authority's work was sound during the last inspection. The LEA's own assessment is that it continues to be so. No fieldwork was carried out, but the documentation examined leads the inspection team to agree with the authority's self-evaluation.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

78. This aspect was not inspected previously. However, an earlier inspection of the authority's Best Value review of its gifted and talented pupils' support service found this to be good, with promising prospects of improvement. The service continues to be good and the general support given by the LEA to gifted and talented pupils is highly satisfactory. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in Key Stages 1 and 2 is in line with national averages. The proportion achieving at least five GCSE higher grades is above the national level. However, this varies between schools.

79. Given its small size, the gifted and talented support service cannot meet the needs of the whole authority. However, within its terms of reference, it provides schools with expert support on curriculum enrichment and policy-making, as well as training to school staff and support and advice regarding individual pupils. The service is very active, increasingly in response to the LEA's overall policy of monitoring and challenging schools, and works well with external partners. Its action plan following the Best Value review rightly emphasises the potential role of advanced skills teachers in supporting schools.

80. The LEA also supports gifted and talented pupils in other ways. Specialist materials are being developed at Key Stage 3; master classes in mathematics have been provided for some primary pupils; Connexions advisers are being trained in the needs of gifted and talented pupils; and some partnership work is taking place between schools, aimed particularly at the most able pupils. In addition, ideas and materials are being disseminated via the intranet; some talented young sportspeople are being given financial support to pursue competitive careers; and a New Opportunities funded out-of-hours arts project, while not aimed deliberately at talented pupils, has the potential to help such children develop their skills.

81. Despite this good range of work, the LEA has no general strategy for gifted and talented provision, and the link between the school improvement service and the gifted and talented support service is not clear. This is particularly important, given that the LEA's own analysis shows that, in over a third of secondary schools, the pupils with the highest prior attainment make progress from Key Stage 3 to GCSE at a rate below the national average.

Recommendations

In order to have a more coherent policy regarding gifted and talented pupils:

- make clear how the routine work of monitoring and challenge undertaken by the link inspectors will draw on the work of the gifted and talented support service; and
- identify and plan to meet the needs of pupils with particular talents in art, music and sport and those who achieve the highest standards at entry to Key Stage 4.

Support for school management

82. The previous inspection judged this work to be unsatisfactory because of its variability. Since then, it has improved and is now highly satisfactory.

83. Ofsted inspections show general improvements in the quality of management and efficiency between Lincolnshire schools' first and second inspections and fewer schools have fallen in the serious weaknesses or special measures categories than previously. Meanwhile, the LEA has continued to develop a more coherent pattern of provision, based on identification of schools' needs.

84. The authority has managed several important programmes of support for senior managers in recent years, and has maintained a good emphasis on strengthening schools' capacity for self-evaluation. It has provided a well-attended course in self-evaluation, and promoted initiatives such as Investors in People. Support for senior managers includes valued links with regional universities. The new system of moderated self-review is designed to bring with it a comprehensive framework for continuous professional development, which itself will lead into schools' development planning. Link advisers' annual visits to schools include some shared lesson visiting, which not only allows the LEA to monitor national strategies, but also, sensibly, to coach school staff in lesson evaluation. New headteachers are given useful additional support by their link inspector and by a mentor. The development of experienced headteachers is promoted by using them as mentors, school improvement officers, or consultants.

85. Support for middle managers is more variable. They have not yet been involved in training for moderated school self-review, but EDP2 sensibly includes plans for improving the support given to them in their monitoring and evaluation work. Some courses are provided for staff seeking middle or senior management posts, but take-up by secondary teachers is below the national level. However, useful intensive support has been given to middle management in a group of schools facing challenging circumstances, and the advanced skills teachers scheme is providing valued support to managers in certain subjects. The LEA is aware of the need to review support for middle managers.

Support to governors

86. Support to school governors has improved since the last inspection and is now highly satisfactory. Relocation of governor training and support into the school improvement service has led to more emphasis on this work and link inspectors are working more closely with governing bodies to help them improve their skills in monitoring school performance. This programme includes in-school training with a specific focus on schools causing concern.

87. The unfilled vacancies for LEA governors are well below the national average. Although the LEA does not hold a register of experienced governors, it has successfully appointed additional governors to some schools causing concern.

88. The LEA consults governing bodies closely and communicates well with them. Governors receive regular information about local and national developments through newsletters, area fora and via the authority's network. These initiatives, together with annual governors' conferences and course feedback, are used to identify additional training needs. A governors' helpline is well used. Governors are satisfied with the advice they are given and issues raised are appropriately referred to link inspectors.

89. The LEA continues to offer useful courses for new governors and chairs of governing bodies, but, apart from an increased number of courses relating to school improvement issues, the overall programme has not changed a great deal and is not attractive to long-serving governors. This accounts, in part, for the fact that the take up of training remains static and there continues to be a high level of course

cancellation. Accessibility of training in the more remote areas of the county remains a problem. These weaknesses are recognised by the LEA and are being addressed through the new school improvement partnership, which plans to provide courses tailored more to the training needs of individual schools, or groups of schools. Moderated school self-review will also be used to identify the weaknesses in, and the training needs of, individual governing bodies.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

90. The previous inspection found support for management services to be satisfactory. At that time, the strategic partnership for management service was new. Support in this area remains satisfactory. Provision for finance, personnel, property and ICT support is offered to schools, on behalf of the LEA, by the strategic partner. It is for schools themselves to decide whether or not to purchase any or all of these services. However, there is only a single service level option for each of the services available. This is too inflexible. The price for services is based on the funds originally delegated in 1999, adjusted each year for inflation and changes in pupil numbers. The specifications for services to schools were revised at the start of 2002 and schools were extensively consulted about changes. However, a weakness of this process was that it did not cover the mechanism for setting charges for services. A review of this, to ensure that prices more accurately reflect current costs and usage, is now overdue.

91. Services are provided on a six-monthly renewal basis and schools are also able to buy advice from the strategic partner as and when they need it. Although the LEA supports the principle of schools procuring their own services, it does not provide them with information about alternative providers of services.

92. The provision of services to schools is covered by the main contract between the council and the strategic partner. This is subjected to rigorous monitoring, to ensure that it provides good value. Service specifications are clear and performance against contract is closely monitored. However, services to schools are not monitored separately within these corporate arrangements. Corporately, the strategic partner has been regularly achieving 98 per cent success in relation to key performance indicators. Where the required standard is not achieved, remedial action is taken and, in the most persistent cases, penalties are imposed. Where schools receive unsatisfactory service, the LEA, in conjunction with the strategic partner, has initiated appropriate remedial action. Where schools decide to purchase services from other providers, the LEA's service specification provides a useful guide to develop their own specifications.

Recommendations

In order to increase further the cost effectiveness and flexibility of services to schools:

- ensure that contract prices reflect current costs of service delivery;
- provide schools with a range of options for each service; and
- ensure schools receive impartial information and advice about services offered by a range of providers.

93. The LEA makes no direct provision for **cleaning and grounds maintenance services**. For these services, good client support is provided to the 83 per cent of schools that buy into the contract. The service responds promptly and effectively to school requests and schools are satisfied with this service.

94. The council corporately has entered into a long-term contract with a strategic partner to provide a full range of support services. At the outset, the strategic partner agreed to save the council £5 million pounds per year over a ten-year period, the savings to be redirected to front-line service, including schools. A major contribution was to be made through the introduction of an on-line business management system that integrated finance, personnel and other services and reduced duplication and data entry. This system was introduced to county council offices during 2000. After initial difficulties, it now works well and enables the effective management of central education budgets.

95. In the previous inspection, **financial services** to schools were satisfactory. The service is now unsatisfactory, although with promising prospects for recovery in the coming months. The programme of installing the integrated business management system in schools began in 2001 and is nearly complete. The system change was not well managed. The capacity of the ICT infra-structure has not been sufficient to enable prompt and reliable links between schools and the central system. Software licences and staff training places are too few in number. The system is designed for business management and has not been adapted to the particular needs of schools. Monthly reports have not been accurate. The LEA and the strategic partner are now aware of the problems. User groups have been set up to provide mutual support between schools and to inform the strategic partner about the improvements needed. Telephone support has been expanded, further training is planned, additional licences are to be provided to schools and consideration is being given to tailoring the system to the specific needs of schools. School administration computers will be upgraded during 2003/2004 and this, together with planned improvement to the ICT infra-structure, should lead to necessary improvements.

96. Other aspects of financial services are satisfactory. Schools receive budget projections based on current commitments, together with guidance and training to support budget setting.

97. In the previous inspection **personnel services** were satisfactory. They remain satisfactory and casework is a strength. Payroll services and the production of contracts for new staff declined during the introduction of the integrated financial management system and many payments were inaccurate. These problems have largely been resolved, although the reputation of this service will take longer to recover. Industrial relations are effective and measured progress is being made toward the implementation of single status for non-teaching staff. There is good support to schools on capability issues and other potentially difficult personnel issues.

98. There is a well-managed **property repair and maintenance service** for those schools that choose to buy into it through pooling their delegated revenue repair and maintenance funding. This covers servicing contracts, reactive repairs, revenue funded planned maintenance and the management of devolved capital maintenance programmes in those schools that do not make their own arrangements. Until recently, schools have not been given sufficient feedback on the operation of the scheme to enable them to evaluate its costs and benefits. This information is now available through the business management system. Schools that do not purchase the full repair and maintenance package can buy professional advice as and when they need it.

99. The LEA makes adequate provision to **cater for school meals**. Responsibility for the provision of school meals was delegated to schools in 1991. No cooked meal is offered in the great majority of Lincolnshire primary schools. Packed lunches are provided for primary pupils entitled to free school meals. Advice is given to schools about how to ensure that they comply with DfES nutritional guidelines and good client support is available to schools that purchase it, although the majority of secondary schools make their own arrangements. Special schools are satisfied with the service.

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

100. This aspect was not previously inspected. Support in this area is highly satisfactory. Over the last two years, Lincolnshire has been experiencing increasing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of teachers. This has, therefore, been made a local priority within EDP2.

101. In consultation with headteachers, the recently appointed recruitment officer has drawn up a sound plan to address the issue. This is informed by a thorough analysis of the geographical areas, size and types of schools and subjects where recruitment has been difficult. Teachers' age profiles have also been used to anticipate future trends.

102. In the light of this, a range of well-targeted strategies is being implemented. These include the establishment of a recruitment database; weekly email contacts with initial teacher training institutions; recruitment campaigns at colleges and universities in this country and abroad; and advice to schools on how to advertise, interview and appoint. The strategy is being carefully monitored and further plans are modified accordingly. One result, for example, is the bid now being prepared for

the provision of a text message service to enable schools to find supply teachers at short notice. The impact of these approaches is reflected in the considerable reduction in vacancies, from approximately 500 in September 2000 to 40 in September 2002.

103. Support for continuing professional development is satisfactory. The LEA supports headteachers through nationally-accredited leadership programmes and provides a range of training courses for teachers. While attendance has been good, the percentage of courses cancelled has been high. The strategic partner for school improvement, which has recently assumed responsibility for this area, is reviewing the reasons for this. It is also drawing on expertise from outside as well as within the authority. Although it is too early to assess the impact of this, schools show considerable support for the approach planned.

104. The LEA is making good use of the rural academy to enable teachers to develop their skills, through the breadth of experience gained from working in and with several schools within the federation. This is having a positive impact on both the recruitment and retention of teachers, since it provides a wider range of experiences and development opportunities than might otherwise be available.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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

105. In the last inspection, support for special educational needs was satisfactory. No specific fieldwork was conducted in this area. However, on the basis of examination of documentation, school survey responses and discussions with officers, the inspection team's judgement is that the LEA is highly satisfactory in terms of:

- its strategy for SEN;
- the effectiveness with which it exercises its SEN functions to support school improvement; and
- the value for money that it provides in this area.

106. It is satisfactory in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The strategy to promote social inclusion

107. The authority's approach to social inclusion is satisfactory. Its central role is recognised in EDP2, the council's 'Forward Plan' and in the *Strategic Framework for Social Inclusion*.

108. The authority has recently begun to use achievement data to identify 'at risk' groups and to set targets for looked after children. The LEA has not yet developed targets for other groups, but the moderated school self-review process does require schools to set targets for their own identified 'at risk' pupils. The authority makes effective use of a wider range of data in targeting specific initiatives, including Sure Start programmes, neighbourhood nurseries and the rural and coastal academies. In addition, schools have been ranked by use of data from the index of multiple deprivation and grouped into families on the basis of shared characteristics. Both of these initiatives help to ensure more effective targeting of support.

109. Joint work with a range of partners is a strength and the education department contributes appropriately to a number of strategic groups, including the newly established children's modernisation team and the community safety partnership.

110. The authority is targeting resources on a range of relevant projects. For example, four pupil referral units have been upgraded through the asset management plan, the Standards Fund is being targeted on developing eight in-school learning units and the Private Finance Initiative is being used to establish four new schools for pupils with educational and behavioural difficulties. Further initiatives are being supported from Sure Start, Children's Fund, Single Regeneration Budget and the European Social Fund.

111. However, there are still important weaknesses in the LEA's approach. The schools' budget allocation has only recently been adjusted to include a small contribution to the costs of additional educational needs in secondary schools. The authority's approach to providing free school meals in primary schools is at odds with the social inclusion agenda, as it requires eligible pupils to identify themselves in order to receive their entitlement. This singles out pupils from economically disadvantaged families. Another weakness is that the increased provision for excluded pupils has been funded by reducing resources for preventative work with schools.

The supply of school places

112. In the previous inspection, the LEA's response to an overall surplus of school places was identified as slow and fragmented, although the report acknowledged that matching places to demand in a sparsely populated county is a difficult task. The LEA has made good progress. It now plans the provision of school places satisfactorily.

113. The LEA has a high proportion of small schools at both primary and secondary levels. Overall, the proportion of surplus places is close to average. After

considering the unit costs of maintaining a high proportion of small schools, and weighing these against the community benefits of making local authority provision, the LEA has revised its policy for small schools. It has introduced a scheme that requires schools to apply Best Value principles to the provision of school places. Starting this year, the governing bodies of primary schools with fewer than 45 pupils and secondary schools with fewer than 175 pupils are required to conduct a four-yearly Best Value review of the way that the school meets the needs of its pupils and the local community. Over the next three years, the triggers for such reviews will rise to 80 for primary schools and 400 for secondary schools. To assist governors conducting the reviews, the LEA is providing guidance, training and extensive data on performance, costs and details of home-to-school travel patterns. Governors will have to justify continuing with present arrangements, modifying provision or developing partnerships with other schools. The LEA will moderate the outcomes.

114. The strength of this scheme lies in the close involvement of governors in the decision-making process. However, there are also weaknesses. Firstly, the advice and training provided by the LEA encourage governing bodies to look at the wider impact of their proposals. However, because of the way that the review is structured, there is a risk that proposals made in relation to individual schools will not necessarily take into account the impact on other schools or the wider organisational implications. Secondly, although outcomes will be monitored, there is insufficient focus on ensuring external challenge during the course of a review. Thirdly, the timescale for the overall review programme is too long, particularly where secondary schools are concerned. Finally, the figure of 400, used to trigger reviews of secondary schools, is too low and will need to be raised to 600, if all secondary schools that fall within the national definition of small schools are to be reviewed.

Recommendations

In order to ensure cost effective provision of good schools:

- accelerate the programme of Best Value reviews of small schools, particularly of secondary schools;
- ensure that sufficient external challenge is offered during the review process and that the wider implications of proposals are taken into account; and
- extend the programme of reviews to include secondary schools with between 400 and 600 pupils.

115. Effective use is being made of partnerships to support work in this area. The LEA is working with the Learning and Skills Council to review and improve education provision for 16 to 19 year-olds. A Public Finance Initiative has been used to redevelop three primary schools and to reorganise schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The authority is also working with district councils to secure funding from property developers toward the cost of additional school places.

116. The LEA's systems for monitoring and forecasting demand are satisfactory at county and area level, but less accurate at individual school level. The approach to

forecasting secondary numbers is rightly being reviewed in order to address this. The school organisation committee is now well established and operates effectively. The school organisation plan provides necessary information and identifies key issues, but does not separately identify numbers of nursery or sixth form pupils. This would help to give a necessary understanding of issues that will require joint action with the Early Years and Learning and Skills Council partnerships. The LEA maintains good relationships with the church authorities and involves them appropriately in school planning issues.

Recommendation

In order to facilitate better planning of school places:

- identify the numbers of places occupied by early years and sixth form pupils for each school in future editions of the school organisation plan.

Admissions

117. Arrangements for admissions to schools were satisfactory in the previous inspection. The LEA's analysis indicates that this is still the case. No fieldwork was conducted in this area, but documentary evidence examined by the inspection team supports the LEA's judgement.

Asset management

118. At the time of the previous inspection, asset management planning was highly satisfactory. This continues to be the case. The most recent revisions to the asset management plan have been approved by the DfES. As a result, the LEA has autonomy over the allocation of capital funding to schools. The plan has been used well to determine needs and priorities in schools. The resulting capital programme is regularly monitored and reported to councillors and details widely shared with schools. Most projects are completed within time and cost limits. Where there has been slippage, it has been unavoidable. The programme has grown in recent years from £12.2 million in 1999/2000 to £34.4 million in 2002/2003. Approximately one third of the programme is funded by capital grants, one third from revenue contributions to capital and one third from other sources, including capital receipts, borrowing and the Private Finance Initiative.

119. The council has made good use of condition data, which is complete and up to date. The council has a long track record of conducting five-yearly reviews of maintenance, and school buildings overall are in good condition. Repair and maintenance requirements are prioritised appropriately. In 2000, Lincolnshire had a relatively low backlog of condition work of £363 per pupil across all three priority categories, compared with an England average of £824. This was the fourth lowest in the country. Satisfactory progress has been made since and outstanding work in the top priority has reduced from £8.4 million in 2000 to only £612,000 by March 2003. The local authority is now making appropriate progress in addressing building suitability needs, employing data gathered by schools. Capacity data has been developed by reputable consultants and is now up to date.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

120. The previous inspection found that education otherwise than at school was satisfactory. This continues to be the case. Developments in this area have been guided by the Best Value review of January 2002, which looked at provision for excluded pupils. Provision is delivered through the emotional and behavioural support service. Satisfactory provision is made for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils through the four pupil referral units, alternative Key Stage 4 provision, a tuition service, the education centre, and programmes organised in conjunction with colleges of further education. The LEA has the intention of broadening the provision for primary aged pupils excluded from school for 15 days or more. However, at the time of the inspection, the only provision being offered to some of these pupils was full time individual tuition. The weakness of this arrangement is the limited opportunity it offers for social education side by side with academic development.

121. Area reintegration panels have been established to track and monitor excluded pupils and to plan their reintegration where appropriate. Of the reintegrations of pupils last year, only half were completed within prescribed timescales. These panels also receive referrals from any agency that identifies pupils not in school. Many of these pupils are transient, non-attenders or without school places, owing to family circumstances. Of the 157 referred last year, 28 were placed on a full-time alternative programme, 35 were placed in school, four attended college and the remainder were offered home tuition.

122. Individual targets are set for Key Stage 4 pupils on the alternative provision programme, but this practice does not yet extend to other excluded groups.

123. The headteacher of the local hospital school has responsibility for provision for pregnant schoolgirls and teenage parents. Good progress has been made in this area, with an established pathway for health, Connexions and social services to refer pupils to the hospital school, where necessary. Appropriate literature is made available in schools, and statistical information is used to help target preventative work.

124. Pupils receiving tuition for medical reasons are well served by the hospital school and hospital service. Appropriate links with schools are in place to provide continuity in pupils' education. This includes the use of ICT and a co-ordinator has recently been appointed to oversee this aspect of the work. The policy on education of sick children is currently being reviewed in the light of recent national guidance.

125. Additional resources have been committed to enable the LEA to meet the increased Government requirements. The accommodation in the pupil referral units is being improved using the allocation of £0.5 million capital funding. Revenue allocation for excluded pupils has been increased by almost £1 million and, for pupils supported by the hospital service, by £41,000. However, the LEA has still had to redirect resources previously allocated to preventative work. As a result, access to alternative provision to prevent exclusion has been largely withdrawn from secondary schools.

126. The LEA provides appropriate guidance for parents who choose to educate their children at home. This is monitored annually.

Attendance

127. The last inspection judged this aspect to be satisfactory. The LEA's evaluation indicates that this continues to be the case. No fieldwork was conducted. On the basis of the documentary evidence provided, the inspection team's view is that this aspect is satisfactory.

Behaviour support

128. In the last inspection, support for behaviour was satisfactory. While it remains satisfactory, there are some weaknesses. In 2000/2001, exclusions were in line with statistical neighbours and national levels. However, the last academic year saw a rise of 30 per cent in permanent exclusions. Moreover, there was a significant rise in the number of pupils excluded for a fixed period and in the total number of days lost through exclusions. At the same time, recruitment and retention difficulties within the emotional and behavioural support service led to the withdrawal of outreach staff in schools, in order to ensure the continued operation of the pupil referral units. This has had a clear impact on schools and survey returns show a significant decline in satisfaction overall, and a marked decline in the case of secondary schools.

129. The LEA has reviewed the salary structure of the emotional and behavioural support service and established additional posts. There are currently no vacancies and the service is now able to follow its stated policy of improving schools' capacity to support pupils with behavioural and/or attendance difficulties. A common process of referral to the emotional and behavioural support service has been developed and there are plans to target support to schools where analysis of data indicates this is necessary. At the time of the inspection, it was clear that this approach, whilst appropriate, had not been operating for long enough for schools to be confident of its effectiveness. Schools also reported inconsistencies in the quality of advice and support they received.

Recommendation

In order to improve the consistency of behavioural support to schools:

- ensure that the work of the emotional and behavioural support service staff is monitored and evaluated effectively.

130. Learning support units have been established in eight secondary schools and one primary. A management group has been set up to share good practice and develop these resources.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

131. In the last inspection, support for health, safety, welfare and child protection was highly satisfactory. This continues to be the case. The LEA has appointed an officer to co-ordinate all child protection activities within the directorate. This enables consistent representation on the area child protection committee and a number of associated fora, such as the public protection panel, core monitoring group and the LEA regional forum on child protection. All schools have designated teachers and they, along with governors and early years and childcare workers, receive high quality multi-agency training. The LEA maintains a database of training records for each designated teacher.

132. Child protection procedures are clear and the school survey indicates that education department support for child protection remains good. Schools are, however, concerned about the limited response from social services in respect of child protection referrals. The authority plans to address this as part of its response to the recent Best Value review.

133. The LEA takes the necessary steps to meet its responsibilities for health and safety and schools are positive about the support they receive. This includes: an updated health and safety manual; access to training courses for school staff and governors; and guidance and support from the strategic partner for management services. The existing guidance on ensuring the safety of pupils involved in school visits and hazardous activities is being updated in the light of the most recent national recommendations.

Looked after children

134. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA was making highly satisfactory provision for looked after children and this remains the case. The council adopted the education of looked after children policy action plan in October 2000. A Best Value review of corporate parenting was completed in May 2001 and designated posts in education and social services were established in 2000 and 2001 respectively.

135. The above actions have led to progress in many aspects of work relating to looked after children. All schools now have an identified designated teacher and they value the multi-agency training provided. Schools are satisfied with the support they receive. A joint protocol on sharing information between departments has been established, and the progress of looked after children is carefully monitored. Targets have been set for Key Stage 4, but not for the other key stages. Performance at primary level is well below average. There is a commitment to personal education plans for all looked after children and these are monitored by social services.

Measures to combat racism

136. In the last inspection, this aspect was satisfactory. The LEA's assessment indicates that this continues to be the case. No fieldwork was conducted in relation to this area, but the documentary evidence examined leads the inspection team to agree with the LEA's judgement.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

137. There are several strengths, but also significant weaknesses in this area. The strengths result from the quality of leadership of senior officers and the systems which they have established for advising and informing members and for managing the implementation of policies. The weaknesses result partly from the implementation of the model of modernised governance that members have chosen, and partly from the approach they take to decision making.

Corporate planning

138. Corporate planning is satisfactory. The council has six priorities for development, which are clearly set out in the Best Value Performance Plan. These priorities were drawn up by senior officers and members and are shared across the departments at a senior level. However, there was limited consultation with the public in their preparation.

139. At the last inspection, the community plan existed in outline only. It is still in its infancy. However, the authority has established some good partnerships within districts in order to develop this further. The partnership that led to the rural action zone is a good example of this.

140. There is an appropriate emphasis on 'striving for excellence in education' within the Best Value Performance Plan and the latter is linked closely to EDP2. Education is reflected, to a lesser extent, in other corporate plans. There is an increasing emphasis on prioritising education. This is reflected in the increased budgetary allocation to schools and also in the increased funding for centrally maintained education services.

141. Corporate plans are clear, affordable and achievable and reflect a realistic assessment of the issues to be addressed. Education plans relate clearly to the corporate plans.

142. There are satisfactory systems at directorate level for implementing the Best Value Performance Plan. The authority also has well-based plans to use the moderated school self-review system to relate schools' own development plans to EDP2. When in place, this should ensure a coherent link between the council's overall plans and those of individual schools.

143. Lines of responsibility for the implementation of education planning are clear and, in most cases, departments within the directorate work well together. For example, there is a close working relationship between officers responsible for school improvement and those responsible for governor support and teacher recruitment and retention. Similarly, the inclusion of representatives of the two strategic partnerships on the directorate management team ensures coherence and consistency in the implementation of plans. Good co-operative work has also been established with a range of outside bodies (such as the police, health, social

services, Connexions service, arts development and sports development) to support the implementation of plans.

144. There are sound processes for reviewing progress and the authority uses the resulting information to inform and refine further planning. An example of this is the way that the review of the first strategic partnership contract led to modifications in the specification drawn up for the school improvement partnership.

Decision making

145. Corporate decision making is unsatisfactory. Elected members and officers have made several bold decisions, which include the decision to enter into a strategic partnership to support school improvement and to establish a rural action zone. However, there are other crucial areas where decision making has been slow.

146. Members across all parties have been very reluctant to adopt a modernised system of governance. The present leader and cabinet system was introduced in June 2002, but the model adopted largely replicates the previous committee structure. This is intended to maintain cross-party involvement in policy making. In fact, members interviewed were not convinced that it succeeded in doing so and were unclear how the new process actually functioned. Members of the overview and scrutiny committee lack sufficient information to be able to comment in detail on policy. There is confusion over how decisions are made.

147. Headteachers are clear about how the formula for the allocation of funding to specific schools operates and they are regularly consulted on this aspect of policy. However, they have little understanding of the principles applied by the council in deciding what share of the total budget to allocate to education. There has been little consultation on this issue.

148. At the time of the last inspection, the council was belatedly up-dating its 17 year-old policy statement on small schools. A draft statement had been produced, setting out criteria for when schools would be reviewed. Progress on this issue has been slow. A Best Value review programme has been launched recently, allied to other strategies, such as establishing confederations of schools and possibly amalgamating some secondary schools. However, the main impetus for this has come from officers and the mixed messages from members indicate a reluctance to tackle a difficult issue.

Leadership of officers and elected members

149. At the time of the last inspection, leadership provided by senior officers was highly satisfactory. It is now good and the leadership by the director of education is very good. Her leadership skills, vision, and sense of purpose are consistently praised by headteachers in all phases, as well as by elected members and governors. With the support of a well-qualified and experienced senior management team, the director has put in place a very sound school improvement strategy. This has contributed to the marked decline in the number of schools in special measures and serious weaknesses. This work is being further underpinned through innovative partnerships.

150. All members of the departmental management team have high expectations of schools and monitor their own work, and that of schools, rigorously. Headteachers have a clear and shared understanding of what senior officers are aiming to achieve.

151. Members are provided with sound advice from officers through a number of channels, including briefing meetings, seminars and through 'specialist' member contact with specific services. As well as issues of general concern, members are also provided with information pertinent to their own wards and their specific areas of responsibility.

152. Written reports from officers are clear, concise and highlight relevant issues well. Where appropriate, they include a range of options, together with a clear analysis of their implications.

153. Non-executive and scrutiny members are provided with relevant information and advice. However, members of the overview and scrutiny committee do not have sufficient support to conduct their own research, so that they can provide the necessary degree of challenge to the decision-making process.

154. At the last inspection, the quality of leadership provided by elected members was highly satisfactory. There continue to be some strengths, but overall this aspect is now unsatisfactory. Members show close interest in the work of the directorate through the regular meetings with officers and attendance at briefings. They have been supportive of developments of key initiatives, such as the public service agreements and the Private Finance Initiatives. However, as already indicated, decision making has been slow on some crucial aspects. Furthermore, although members are proud of the achievements of the authority's schools and clearly appreciate the importance of education, schools do not understand what vision members have for the future of the education service. Some headteachers felt that members were driven more by financial concerns rather than by a passion for education. Others felt that they did not always appreciate the impact of their decisions on the work of schools. For example, the way in which the review of small schools was introduced had led to misunderstandings in local communities, which could have an adverse effect on recruitment and retention of teachers and pupils.

155. A major weakness in the way that the new model of governance is being implemented is that the differential purposes of overview, policy making and scrutiny are not sufficiently clearly defined or understood in practice. The net result is that it decreases accountability and detracts from the rigour and independence with which policy decisions can be examined and criticised. Since its setting up, the overview and scrutiny committee for education has established effective internal working relationships across parties, but has not seized opportunities to scrutinise areas of the education service that are clearly a cause of concern to schools, such as the ICT network for schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve the rigour with which policies and decisions are examined and criticised:

- separate the overview function from that of scrutiny; and
- provide members responsible for scrutiny with additional support in researching relevant issues.

Partnerships

156. At the last inspection, this aspect was highly satisfactory. The LEA's own assessment indicates that it continues to be so. No field study was conducted but, on the basis of the documentary evidence examined, the inspection team agrees with the judgement of the LEA.

APPENDIX : RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes a number of recommendations. Of these, the following should be acted on as a matter of urgency:

In order to improve the rigour with which policies and decisions are examined and criticised:

- separate the overview function from that of scrutiny; and
- provide members responsible for scrutiny with additional support in researching relevant issues.

In order to ensure cost effective provision of good schools:

- accelerate the programme of Best Values reviews of small schools, particularly of secondary schools;
- ensure that sufficient external challenge is offered during the review process and that the wider implications of proposals are taken into account; and
- extend the programme of reviews to include secondary schools with between 400 and 600 pupils.

The following recommendations will also need to be addressed:

In order to secure maximum benefit to schools from available revenue funding:

- reduce the proportion of the schools' capital programme that is funded from revenue allocations.

In order to ensure that the funding formula reflects the relative costs of delivering the curriculum and addresses specific needs:

- give greater weighting to pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4; and
- increase the funding provision for pupils with additional educational needs.

In order to clarify schools' use of moderated self-review:

- after further consultation with schools, introduce a more standardised system for identifying strengths and weaknesses in schools' provision and performance.

In order to have a more coherent policy regarding gifted and talented pupils:

- make clear how the routine work of monitoring and challenge undertaken by the link inspectors will draw on the work of the gifted and talented support service; and

- identify and plan to meet the needs of pupils with particular talents in art, music and sport and those who achieve the highest standards at entry to Key Stage 4.

In order to increase further the cost effectiveness and flexibility of services to schools:

- ensure that contract prices reflect current costs of service delivery;
- provide schools with a range of options for each service; and
- ensure schools receive impartial information and advice about services offered by a range of providers.

In order to facilitate better planning of school places:

- identify the numbers of places occupied by early years and sixth form pupils for each school in future editions of the school organisation plan.

In order to improve the consistency of behavioural support to schools:

- ensure that the work of the emotional and behavioural support service staff is monitored and evaluated effectively.

© Crown copyright 2003

**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 020 7421 6800

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

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

**Lincolnshire County Council,
County Offices,
Newland,
Lincoln,
LN1 1YL**

A copy can also be obtained from the OFSTED website: www.ofsted.gov.uk