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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1-3
COMMENTARY	4-11
SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	12-16
Performance	17-23
Funding	24-28
Council structure	29-30
The Education Development Plan	31-33
The allocation of resources to priorities	34-37
SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention	38-46
Collection and analysis of data	47-51
Support for literacy	52-59
Support for numeracy	60-63
Support for information and communication technology	64-69
Support for schools causing concern	70-76
Support for governors	77-81
Support for School Management	82-88
Support for early years education	89-90
Recommendations	
SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Corporate planning	91-95
Management services	96-106
Recommendations	
SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION	
Strategy	107-108
Statutory obligations	109
Improvement and value for money	110-114
Recommendations	

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places	115-124
Admissions	125-128
Social exclusion	129
Provision of education otherwise than at school	130-131
Learning support service	132
Educational psychology service	133
Attendance	134-135
Behaviour support	136-138
Health, safety, welfare, child protection	139
Looked after children	140
Minority ethnic and Traveller children	141-142
Education against racism	143
Recommendations	

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the education and cultural services directorate and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 380 schools. The response rate was 75 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 21 mainstream schools and three special schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Lincolnshire is a large rural and mostly sparsely populated county. There are some areas of deprivation, mostly associated with the larger towns, and elsewhere the rural nature of the area creates its own challenges. However, there is not the large-scale disadvantage found in more urban authorities. The LEA has a strong history of successful innovation and achievement in education. In most areas of the LEA selective education has been retained in the secondary phase, although some areas such as the City of Lincoln have comprehensive schools.
5. Lincolnshire continues to lead other LEAs in promoting school autonomy through a high level of delegation of funds, the outsourcing of services and low spending on central administration. Officers and members work well together and demonstrate a purposeful resolve to support schools, including the many small schools, to raise attainment and improve the quality of education. That resolve is clearly set out in the corporate priorities for the Council. The standards achieved by schools are generally in line with or above those of similar LEAs and those nationally. Attendance rates and the behaviour of pupils also compare favourably with schools in other LEAs.
6. The inspection found a number of strengths in the work of the LEA that reflect this picture. The following functions are discharged at least satisfactorily and often well:
 - Promotion of school autonomy through a high level of delegation and outsourcing of services
 - Asset management
 - Support for the national literacy and numeracy strategies
 - Support for pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN)
 - Promotion of social inclusion, particularly through effective behaviour and educational psychology support services
 - Support for schools identified by OFSTED in special measures or with serious weaknesses
 - Support for early years education
7. The diversity of provision in the LEA in terms of the types of school is, however, matched by a considerable range in terms of the quality of education provided by different schools. Despite the overall level of success of its schools the LEA has an unacceptably high proportion of schools with identified weaknesses and there is clear evidence of underachievement, even within some of the selective schools. To address these issues properly the LEA needs to be able to support and challenge schools rigorously and consistently. Crucially, the LEA is not being as effective as it must be in this.
8. Moreover, the LEA has not been sufficiently successful in addressing some of the specific weaknesses it identified in its Education Development Plan (EDP), such as the quality of management in schools and the development of information communication technology (ICT).

9. The following functions are not being exercised satisfactorily or are exercised poorly:
 - Support for the provision and use of data by schools
 - Monitoring and challenging schools to perform better
 - Support to improve school management
 - Support for schools causing concern to the LEA
 - Support for information communication technology (ICT)
 - Provision of timely budget information
 - Tackling mismatches between supply and demand in the provision of secondary school places
10. These weaknesses are critical in that most relate to functions which are fundamental to the LEA's strategy to help improve schools and to prevent others being identified as having serious weaknesses. If the LEA is to build successfully on its strengths it needs to focus its resources more sharply, and with some urgency, on challenging its poor and underachieving schools whilst working to set in place the ICT infrastructure needed to support schools effectively.
11. The new director is working hard to promote a better, and more open, partnership between the LEA and all its schools. Steps have already been taken to restructure what is a 'lean' central team, to sharpen the focus of the EDP, and to review the monitoring and intervention strategy. More remains to be done, for example to improve the focus and consistency of the work of the link inspectors. The view of the inspection team is that the LEA has the ability and capacity to address the weaknesses identified in this report but an early re-inspection is recommended to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of the LEA's response to the recommendations.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Lincolnshire is a large and predominantly rural county with a population of approximately 623,000. The fourth largest county in England it has the fourth lowest population density, although the population is increasing, especially in the south. Over two thirds of wards in Lincolnshire are classified as sparse or 'supersparse'. There are some areas of relative deprivation, largely coterminous with the major towns such as Boston, Grantham and Lincoln, and seasonal unemployment and low average hourly earnings are significant socio-economic factors, however there are not the high levels of social disadvantage found in more urban authorities. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is in line with similar LEAs but below that nationally.
13. The proportion of the population with higher education qualifications is in line with similar LEAs but below that nationally. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need (SEN) is in line with that for similar LEAs and nationally for both primary and secondary age pupils, whilst there is a slightly higher proportion of primary age pupils in special schools than is the case in similar LEAs.
14. Lincolnshire has a greater diversity of schools than many LEAs, including selective grammar schools, secondary modern schools and comprehensive schools. In a few areas such as the City of Lincoln the comprehensive schools admit pupils representing the full ability range. Most areas have selective grammar schools and here many schools designated as comprehensive actually have an intake more typical of secondary modern schools.
15. The number and types of school in the LEA are shown below:

Nursery schools	5
Primary schools	289
Secondary Grammar schools	15
Secondary Comprehensive schools	13
Secondary Bi-Lateral schools	1
Secondary Modern schools	34
Special schools	19
Pupil Referral Units	4
16. The schools cater for just over 90,300 pupils of compulsory school age. There are a further 2,255 pupils under school age in maintained primary schools and 5,087 students in sixth forms. Many of the schools are small. Half the secondary schools have fewer than 600 students; one in eight has fewer than 300 on roll. Historically a large proportion of Lincolnshire schools were grant maintained.

Performance

17. Overall results in Lincolnshire schools are in line with or above both statistical neighbour and national averages, although there is significant variability between results in different schools and OFSTED inspections demonstrate a mixed picture in terms of the quality of education.
18. Results for tests/tasks at Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with or above both statistical neighbour and national averages, with the exception of the writing tests, where the percentage of pupils achieving Level 3 or above was below statistical neighbour averages. At Key Stage 2 results are broadly in line with statistical neighbour and national averages except for science, where the percentage of girls achieving Level 5 or above is below statistical neighbour averages.
19. At Key Stage 3 all results are broadly in line with or above both statistical neighbour and national averages. At age 16, all GCSE indicators are in line with or above statistical neighbour and national averages, with the improvement in average points score (APS) being above both the statistical neighbour and national rate. At age 16 girls outperform boys on all GCSE indicators in line with the national picture.
20. At age 18 results for two or more A Levels and for Advanced GNVQ are well above statistical neighbour and national averages; for fewer than two A Levels they are in line. With the exception of BTEC results, which are below average against national and statistical neighbours, all other results are in line with or above the statistical neighbour and national average.
21. Lincolnshire is well placed to achieve its original year 2000 Key Stage 2 English targets, with only a 0.4 percentage point gain needed. However, a more significant gain of 4.3 percentage points is necessary to achieve its mathematics target. For attainment at age 16 Lincolnshire achieved its 2000 five or more A*-C target in 1999. Appropriately, therefore, the LEA has very recently revised its targets. The original ones were over-cautious and clearly do not present sufficient challenge against the current performance of schools.
22. In primary schools the latest OFSTED inspection data show that the percentage of Lincolnshire schools judged to be good or very good is in line with schools nationally, but below those for statistical neighbours. The percentage of schools judged to have good or very good standards and climate is at least in line with schools nationally and statistical neighbours. However, the quality of education and of management and efficiency is slightly below that for schools nationally and below that for statistical neighbours.
23. In secondary schools inspection data show that the percentage of Lincolnshire schools requiring much improvement is higher than for schools nationally and for statistical neighbours. The percentage of Lincolnshire secondary schools judged to be good or very good overall is slightly below that for schools nationally and well below compared with statistical neighbours. In particular, the percentage of schools judged to be good or very good for standards

achieved, quality of education, and management and efficiency is below that for schools nationally and well below that for statistical neighbours.

Funding

24. Lincolnshire's education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per school-age pupil for 2000/2001 is about four per cent below the national average. This reflects, amongst other factors, the low level of social deprivation. The Council has consistently spent above SSA on education, although in recent years spending has converged towards it. All of the increase in SSA for 2000/01 was passed to schools in line with Government expectations.

	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Budget (£ million)	228.0	240.4	252.1	267.6
SSA (£ million)	215.2	236.2	250.7	265.5
Budget as percentage of SSA	105.9	101.8	100.5	100.8

Source: LEA Form 2 return for the inspection

25. Planned expenditure per primary pupil in 2000/2001 is lower than both the statistical neighbour and county averages.

	Local Schools Budget per pupil
Lincolnshire	£2,594
English counties	£2,692
Statistical neighbours	£2,697
All LEAs in England	£2,817

26. The Council has a policy of not borrowing to fund capital expenditure, but has been active and successful in securing capital receipts and grants from a variety of sources to support a sharply increased capital programme for school building improvements in 2000/2001. It has been innovative in developing partnerships with the private sector including, for example, the planned provision of seven new schools through a private finance initiative (PFI) scheme.
27. The level of delegation is high and reflects the LEA's support for school autonomy. In 2000/2001, the LEA is delegating 88 per cent of the Local Schools Budget, the highest of all county authorities. A large majority of the schools surveyed were satisfied with the level of delegation. Expenditure of £21 per pupil on central administration is, by some margin, the lowest of all LEAs, and well inside the Government's maximum target of £65 per pupil.
28. The funding formula itself is appropriately simple. There is, for example, no factor for the size of buildings or grounds. This promotes efficient use of premises since there is no additional funding for schools with more space than they need. However, most of the original rationale for the amounts allocated through each element of the formula, including the very high proportion of the

total budget allocated through the age weighted pupil unit, is historic. Partly as the outcome of a pilot Best Value review of financial services for schools, a group including representative headteachers is currently undertaking a needs-led review of the existing delegation scheme.

Council Structure

29. Lincolnshire County Council has had a Conservative majority for three years following the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition. The education committee comprises 39 members (19 Cons, 8 Lab, 5 Liberal Democrat, 1 Independent, 6 others including 3 parent governors all with voting rights). Other committees include an appeals sub-committee and a children's services sub-committee, which also reports to the social services committee. There has been some discussion but no final agreement on reorganising the committee structure in line with the modernising local government agenda.
30. The director of education and cultural services was new in post in April this year, together with one of the three assistant directors, after a period of some months when the latter post remained unfilled. Two out of the four most senior postholders are, therefore, new to the LEA. In the recent past there has been a recent restructuring of the department followed by a self-review carried out by a panel including headteachers. The restructuring was appropriate and it has enabled third tier postholders to have greater involvement in strategic planning.

The Education Development Plan

31. Lincolnshire's Education Development Plan (EDP) is a low-cost plan with several positive features, but also some weaknesses. The priorities identified in the EDP are appropriate and relate well to a comprehensive audit. The priorities for the first year of the plan are:
 - improving the quality of school leadership and management;
 - raising standards in literacy;
 - raising standards in numeracy;
 - raising expectations;
 - enriching the quality of learning through the use of information and communication technology;
 - raising standards in schools causing concern; and
 - improving the quality of education for four-year-olds.
32. In relation to literacy and numeracy, for example, the planned actions are suitable and have already begun to impact positively on standards. However, in the area of ICT the plan is not sufficiently coherent with the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) strategy and the actions related to improving management are not sufficiently radical. There is satisfactory targeting of actions in most of the priorities but some success criteria are not sufficiently precise. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are sound and include self-evaluation of the LEA's performance. The recent review of progress against the first draft of the EDP has been reasonably objective and the subsequent revision of the plan has

improved the focus further. However, it has not completely addressed the weakness in success criteria.

33. Consultation on the EDP was good and schools generally have a satisfactory understanding of the way in which the priorities contained in the plan relate to their own circumstances and development planning. Nevertheless, as in many LEAs, not all schools make effective use of the EDP as part of their own planning process.

The allocation of resources to priorities

34. The allocation of resources to priorities, including the balance of funding between priorities within the EDP, is good. Members have given a commitment to continue to spend at least at the level of SSA. There are targets for efficiency savings in order to maximise front-line services. Officers have appropriate discretion to redirect savings to other priorities, for example an underspend of the education administration budget in 1999/2000 is to be used to double the number of summer literacy and numeracy schemes. One of the Council's priorities is to build strong rural communities and this is clearly reflected in the protection the delegation scheme provides for small primary schools.
35. Structures for the implementation of Best Value are in place and the Council's Best Value Performance plan has received a satisfactory audit. The external auditor commented favourably on the close and visible links between the EDP and corporate objectives. As a Best Value pilot authority, Lincolnshire has already undertaken reviews in four education areas. These were monitoring and intervention, financial services for schools, educational psychology, and services for sensory-impaired children. These were of variable quality but lessons were learnt from the exercises, particularly in attempting to compare costs and consult stakeholders in a meaningful way.
36. The delegation scheme for schools includes a statement of Best Value principles which is clear and well-adapted for schools. Headteachers interviewed during the school visits were aware of the importance that the Council places on Best Value, although there has been little impact on existing practice so far. Senior officers are well informed about the requirements of Best Value, but do not systematically provide information to schools on alternative service providers.
37. All the management support services contribute a range of helpful comparative data to an annual management information pack which is provided for each school to support self-evaluation and promote value for money.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

38. The quality of support provided by the LEA is often good. However, the monitoring and challenging of schools lack sufficient rigour and are too variable. Overall, this area of the LEA's work is unsatisfactory.
39. In most schools visited there was evidence of successful support such as that provided through the literacy and numeracy strategies, or from subject advisers or link inspectors. The best support was characterised by clear identification of the needs of the school, either by the school itself or through discussions with LEA personnel. In particular, appropriate, well-targeted and effective support has been provided to schools identified through OFSTED inspections as having serious weaknesses or which are subject to special measures. Another example of suitable support is where the LEA, in discussion with individual schools, has provided additional staffing resources to support 'borderline' pupils to achieve Level 4 in National Curriculum tests after originally being forecast to achieve Level 3.
40. The LEA has a long established monitoring and intervention strategy, which has recently been reviewed through the Best Value review process. The strategy is clearly set out and the basic processes are essentially sound, including the gathering and consideration of information from a range of sources such as the personnel and finance sections. The recent pilot Best Value review of the strategy was not sufficiently rigorous in terms of the consultation process employed or in its consideration of alternative organisational arrangements for delivery of the strategy. Nevertheless, it has helped the LEA to identify some important weaknesses in its strategy and these are now being addressed.
41. The implementation of the strategy remains flawed, however, in that there is too little consistency in the rigour with which link inspectors monitor and challenge their schools. Equally, by visiting all schools regularly, including successful schools, the LEA is limiting the resources available to work with those schools which are identified as needing more help.
42. In the past the LEA set out to visit all schools at least termly. This pattern of visiting is said to have ended in March 2000, although few headteachers are aware of the change in policy. The recent 'focus' visits by link inspectors have resulted in some detailed and potentially useful evaluation of particular aspects of education in the LEA, such as staffing issues; but it is too early to identify any improvements stemming from this analysis. The visits are generally welcomed by schools who see them as mostly supportive and occasionally challenging. Despite this only just over half of the primary schools and approximately one third of the secondary schools where this was a focus felt that their link inspector knew the school thoroughly. There was little evidence of the LEA using schools' self-evaluation as a coherent part of its own monitoring and intervention strategy to improve link inspectors knowledge of the schools.

43. In a significant minority of the schools visited by HMI, despite regular monitoring by the LEA, there was evidence of weaknesses. These were often related to poor management or low expectations. Worryingly, in some cases the LEA was aware of the issues but had failed to communicate them clearly to the headteacher or governors and it had not challenged the school sufficiently to recognise and address the weaknesses.
44. The degree to which the link inspectors know their schools clearly influences the extent to which they can provide credible challenge, especially during the target-setting process. Many schools visited did not feel that the LEA knew them or their pupils well enough to appreciate the particular local circumstances which needed careful consideration when setting targets. Link inspectors are restricted further in the level of challenge they can offer by the lack of a central pupil database containing accurate information about individual pupils.
45. There was concern from six out of eight primary schools where target setting was discussed that the LEA had undermined the target-setting process in 1999 by pressing them to raise their targets by a further 3 per cent two or three weeks after the targets had been agreed with link inspectors. In some cases this was done by telephone. This problem was caused by the LEA realising, late in the autumn term of 1999, that aggregated school targets did not support the LEA's own targets. In four schools visited the insensitivity of the way this was handled by the LEA was seen to be a significant issue.
46. There were good examples of schools where the link inspector has clearly analysed all of the available information about the school, knows the school well and has successfully challenged the school to improve beyond the level it might have reached unassisted. Too often, however, link inspectors have simply not found the right balance between challenge and support. In five of the schools visited headteachers reported that the link inspector admitted that the school was being asked to set unrealistically high targets to help meet the aggregated LEA target. This clearly undermines the extent to which the challenge is seen as appropriate and it considerably weakens one of the LEA's major strategies to raise expectations.

Collection and Analysis of Data

47. The collection and analysis of data are unsatisfactory overall because of the lack of an effective central pupil database, the untimely provision of data to schools and inconsistent support to schools in analysis of the data. Nevertheless some useful data are provided to schools and this area is improving rapidly following recent key appointments.
48. Schools are provided with helpful school level Key Stage and GCSE data which enables them to evaluate their own performance and to compare that performance with other schools in the LEA. Some of the data allows the schools to make comparisons with similar schools, although the LEA has not successfully brokered an agreement with schools which would allow them to identify other schools. This would increase the usefulness of the data for making more specific comparisons.

49. Many schools visited felt the data they produce for themselves were more comprehensive at the individual pupil level and more useful in helping set targets, especially so for the secondary sector. The LEA sees the establishment of common baseline tests and the tracking of individual pupil progress as a priority area for attention. Indeed, a large proportion of schools already use a common base line test with reception and Year 7 pupils. However, the LEA's central pupil database is not scheduled to be fully operational until 2002 and the standards and performance team cannot always track individual pupils into secondary school in time for some useful data to be made available.
50. Evidence from school visits shows a wide variability of understanding by headteachers and governors in the analysis and use of performance data, especially in the setting of well-grounded individual pupil and overall school targets. This was a particular problem in primary schools where there was inconsistent or too little support provided to enable schools to make full use of the data available. In five out of eight primary schools headteachers needed additional training in the understanding and use of the LEA data provided. Secondary headteachers were significantly more confident in their understanding of the data, although most produced their own, which often mirrored that sent by the LEA but was more timely.
51. The time taken to provide some analyses also limits their usefulness. For reception age children, value added data from baseline to the end of year tests did not reach schools until late in the spring term. In June 2000 primary schools received matched pupil data on progress from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2 for pupils who are now at the end of Year 7 in secondary school. Although the data have some use for the primary schools in reviewing their own practice, to support individual pupils the data needs to be sent to the secondary schools the pupils now attend.

Support for Literacy

52. Support for the development of literacy is good. Overall, the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy has been effective and well managed.
53. Raising standards in literacy is priority 2 in the EDP. Results for 1999 are in line with both national and statistical neighbours and demonstrate that schools in Lincolnshire, on average, are improving at a faster rate than are schools nationally for English. The LEA improvement from 1998 to 1999 was 6.7 per cent, the national improvement for the same period being 5.6 per cent. The authority has to achieve an overall improvement of 10.4 per cent to reach its 2002 literacy target, but was already close to achieving its 73 per cent year 2000 target in 1999.

Key Stage 2 Test Results and Targets for English; Pupils attaining level 4 or above			
	1998	1999	Target 2002
Lincolnshire LEA	65.9%	72.6%	83%
National	64.8%	70.4%	
Statistical neighbours	66.5%	72.6%	

54. Of those primary schools visited where literacy was a theme of the visit seven had received intensive literacy support. Appropriate strategies were in place for raising standards of literacy and each had received significant levels of support. The actual improvements achieved in 1999 were variable between schools, with two actually showing falls in attainment, one significantly. These schools have since been appropriately challenged and supported by the LEA.
55. In all schools visited the quality of training for literacy was regarded as good or excellent and, with the exception of one school, the LEA's literacy consultants had provided high quality and effective support. Intensive support schools identified their support as being particularly good. In the school survey 59 per cent of primary headteachers indicated that support for the teaching of literacy was good or very good and 94 per cent indicated that it was at least satisfactory.
56. In an LEA analysis of Key Stage 2 data for literacy, two distinct groups of schools achieved less than the county average. The LEA has used the results of this research to identify the most efficient way of allocating additional resources to support literacy improvement across the county.
57. The management and implementation of the National Literacy Strategy is based on a clearly written plan involving targets for improvement, management, training and resource implications, including support from other agencies. Literacy service action plans for 1999-2000 clearly identify targets, success criteria, personnel and resources needed. A report on the implementation of the first year of the strategy has also been produced, detailing strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for further improvement for schools and for the LEA.
58. The LEA has supported literacy further by encouraging a large number of summer schools, including three for Year 5. In 1999 27 literacy schools were run, 11 supported by Standards Fund and 16 entirely by the LEA. In 2000 there are to be 29 literacy schools, three numeracy schools and six schools for gifted and talented pupils.
59. A range of further initiatives include the setting up of 40 family literacy projects and support for schools to achieve the Basic Skills Quality Mark, with 32 schools being successful so far. Nine schools in Boston have also been involved with local businesses on a Partners in Reading scheme.

Support for numeracy

60. Support for the development of numeracy is good. Numeracy results for 1999 are in line with both national and statistical neighbours and demonstrate that schools in Lincolnshire, on average, are improving at a slightly slower rate than schools nationally. The LEA improvement from 1998 to 1999 was 9.6 per cent, the national improvement for the same period being 10.5 per cent. The authority has to achieve an improvement of 4.3 per cent to achieve its 2000 target of 75 per cent and an overall improvement of 8.3 per cent to reach its 2002 numeracy target of 79 per cent.

Key Stage 2 Test Results and Targets for Mathematics; Pupils attaining level 4 or above			
	1998	1999	Target 2002
Lincolnshire LEA	61.1%	70.7%	79%
National	58.5%	69.0%	75%
Statistical neighbours	60.3%	70.2%	

61. Of the six schools visited where numeracy was a theme of the visit, five were receiving intensive support. Appropriate strategies were in place to support the raising of standards, although it is too early to judge whether the support is effective.
62. In five out of the six schools, the quality of training for numeracy has been good or excellent and, with the exception of one school, the LEA's numeracy consultants were well regarded. As with the literacy strategy, intensive support schools identified their support as being particularly good.
63. The management and implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy are based on a clearly written plan, similar in format to that for literacy, involving targets for improvement, management, training and resource implication. By appointing leading mathematics teachers, many with experience of mixed age classes, the LEA is improving the guidance and support to the large number of small schools.

Support for information and communication technology

64. The quality of the support schools are currently receiving for ICT in the curriculum is inadequate and progress towards meeting the aims and objectives of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) initiative is poor. Overall standards in ICT are currently in line with statistical neighbours and national averages at Key Stages 1 and 2 and are marginally better than national averages but significantly below those of statistical neighbours at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, standards are well below both similar authorities and nationally. There has been a marked diminution in standards in all Key Stages in the LEA between old Framework and new Framework inspections.

65. The LEA made ICT a priority in its EDP and it is appropriate to have done so given the evidence of its own audit and of current standards, particularly in secondary schools. The broad intentions encompassed within this priority are clear but the actions and related activities envisaged lack precision and logical focus. These shortcomings are recognised by the LEA in its *Evaluation of Progress of the EDP – November 1999*. At present, the links between the EDP priority and the NGfL strategy are tenuous and are militating against the establishment of a coherent strategy to effectively support ICT developments in schools.
66. Support for ICT was identified as a considerable weakness by primary, secondary and special schools in the school survey. In all but one of the schools visited where ICT was a focus during the inspection, headteachers expressed dissatisfaction about the implementation of the NGfL and about the LEA support for ICT developments more generally. Nine had similarly negative views about the quality of technical support for hardware and software. Only one school felt that they had received a satisfactory level of support in the implementation of their NGfL strategy. In between the criticisms, many schools did acknowledge that excessive demands were being placed upon a very small central ICT team.
67. Schools with a strong expertise in ICT felt that they could have made better use of the NGfL funds if they had been delegated. They found, belatedly, that this was, indeed, an option. There has been some delay in obtaining these monies from the authority once a school has decided to act independently and schools are critical of the proportion being retained by the LEA for central initiatives. The great majority of schools are relying upon the LEA to support them in their NGfL developments and ten of these schools were visited. Each had its own catalogue of frustrations to describe. These ranged from poor or non-existent advice to equipment wrongly installed or simply not working properly.
68. Accessing of New Opportunities Funding (NOF) has rightly been linked to the development by schools of their own ICT policy. However, confusion exists as to whether or not this requirement still exists, with the schools that had complied with the request being unsure of the criteria being adopted by the LEA for quality control. A recommended list of providers of NOF training as an adjunct to the ICT fair would be valuable.
69. Aspects of the service are, nevertheless, performing well. A review of participants' comments after attending ICT training courses shows that most are highly valued. Recommended schemes of work are beginning to be available and are appropriate. Worthwhile developments are being made in broad band technologies and suitable plans exist for the use of the Internet and the Intranet, amongst others. In order to build upon these areas of credibility, the LEA needs to take immediate steps to make the improvements that it has identified.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

70. Support for schools causing concern is unsatisfactory, although that for schools designated by OFSTED as having serious weakness (SW) or subject to special measures (SM) is generally good. One of the LEA's targets is to ensure no schools are subject to SW or SM by the end of 2002. However, the LEA has yet to reach a position where it can be satisfied that it has done all it can to identify and support schools effectively which are likely to be judged a concern in a future OFSTED inspection.
71. A relatively high proportion of schools is designated by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. HMI monitoring visits indicate that the support provided by the LEA for these schools has been satisfactory or good to the extent that some schools have improved more quickly than is common nationally. Successful strategies employed by the LEA have included helping to bring about a change of headteacher, appointing additional experienced governors, and providing suitable support to bring about much needed improvements in teaching.
72. The LEA has recently appointed four school improvement officers to provide intensive support to schools with weaknesses. This initiative has the potential to improve the support further, although it is too early to evaluate its impact. In a further initiative, work on pairing successful schools with schools in special measures or having serious weaknesses and using the Beacon School network is successfully underway. This innovative strategy has the advantage of enabling additional staff to be recruited to work mainly at a weak school to disseminate good practice, whilst being contracted to a successful school.
73. The picture for those schools identified by the LEA as having weaknesses is less positive. There are currently 42 schools on the LEA's 'pink' list, which identifies schools with weaknesses which are a cause for concern and in which there is some LEA intervention. A further 44 schools are on the 'primrose' list which identifies additional schools the LEA has some concerns about. Visits to schools during the inspection demonstrated that there is too little transparency in the process of identifying and reporting on such schools. More significantly, it was also clear that not all schools that might have been identified by the LEA as a cause for concern have been so identified, especially in the case of schools which are under-performing.
74. The information schools receive about the reasons for being placed on the pink list, and the information supplied to such schools following the regular meetings of the LEA's monitoring and intervention panel, are inadequate. Headteachers and governors are not always informed about the specific reasons for having been identified as a cause for concern and they are not automatically informed about the actions decided at the panel meetings. Similarly, schools are not automatically notified about being placed on the primrose list and indeed the LEA has introduced this list without making all schools aware of its existence or purpose.

75. The monitoring and intervention panel meets regularly and, appropriately, the senior officers present discuss a range of evidence from different sources about the operation of the schools. However, the triggers for determining intervention lack clarity and the actions decided by the panel too often lack specificity and clear success criteria. The arrangements for informing schools about the outcomes of formal 'review' visits, which are often part of the action plan for schools causing concern, are more transparent but the incisiveness of these reviews is variable.
76. Significantly, there was clear evidence from the school visits that the LEA's procedures for the identification and support of schools causing concern are not sufficiently rigorous to identify and support all appropriate schools, particularly in cases where the schools are under-performing.

Support for governors

77. The support for governing bodies is satisfactory overall and is improving. There are, however, weaknesses in the measures taken to involve governors in routine feedback about the work of the school.
78. Governor support is offered as a package in return for a percentage of the relevant Standards Fund allocation. The LEA organises a suitably broad range of training courses, which take place at various locations around the county to reduce travel for governors. The courses are well regarded and there is evidence of a positive impact in terms of improved confidence. Attendance at these courses is monitored but the LEA does not make sufficient use of the information to target particular governing bodies for training.
79. Consultation is effective through the Governor Partnership meetings and arrangements for providing governors with information about relevant legislation and the work of the LEA are satisfactory. This includes a regular newsletter which has, in recent editions, contained useful and innovative self-evaluation criteria on different aspects of the work of the governing body.
80. The monitoring and filling of vacant LEA places on governing bodies is satisfactory and there are few long-standing vacancies. The LEA has appointed additional governors in some situations where schools have been identified with significant weaknesses and this strategy has been effective in facilitating improvements in the school, particularly where the weaknesses related directly to the quality of governance.
81. One area of support that needs further improvement is in routine involvement of governors in all aspects of feedback about the school by link inspectors. The chair of governors is usually sent a copy of any written feedback but governors are not automatically invited to be present when the link inspector visits the school.

Support for school management

82. Support for improving school management is variable in its effectiveness and is unsatisfactory overall. Action to date has not been sufficiently coherent or radical and the overall impact has been too patchy.
83. The LEA has recognised weaknesses in school management in its EDP and it has 'Improving the quality of school leadership and management' as its first priority. The diversity of types and sizes of schools clearly adds to the challenge faced by the LEA in addressing weaknesses in management. In many small schools, for example, headteachers are understandably reluctant to leave their schools for meetings or training because of the impact on pupils and staff, especially when they have a significant teaching commitment. There is also considerable variation in the quality of management in some former grant maintained schools, which the LEA has had little time to influence directly.
84. Analysis of OFSTED inspection data indicates that overall 15 per cent of Lincolnshire secondary schools require much improvement for management and efficiency, compared to 7 per cent nationally and 4 per cent for statistical neighbours. Data for schools that have been inspected twice suggests that there has been a slight improvement in secondary school management but this is less marked than in other LEAs. In primary schools, unlike the national picture and that for statistical neighbours, the proportion of schools requiring much improvement for management and efficiency has actually increased.
85. The LEA has had some, albeit uneven, success in addressing the issue. Five out of ten primary headteachers visited and three out of six secondary headteachers had undertaken the OFSTED self-evaluation course, run by LEA inspectors, which included training on classroom observation. This course was highly praised by participants. In primary schools receiving additional LEA support, headteachers have been trained by link inspectors in classroom observation, as have headteachers and co-ordinators in schools receiving intensive literacy or numeracy support. In these schools this has often had a positive impact but elsewhere headteachers have received too little or no training in this important management process.
86. Appropriate support is offered through national training programmes. For instance, the LEA's Headlamp training, called 'Headlinc', has a take up of 100 per cent of all new headteachers appointed and is generally regarded by participants interviewed as "focused and useful". However, some felt the first two day course lacked rigour and was too involved with 'networking'. Take-up of LPSH training is up to targets set. Criticism of how and when mentors are allocated to new headteachers was a common theme on school visits. Mentoring is regarded as an area where the LEA is now less effective than it was in the past.
87. Lincolnshire runs an associate programme, giving high performing headteachers the opportunity to share their expertise and knowledge with other schools as a temporary link inspector. This programme allows those involved to share their expertise and gives them invaluable professional development.

Despite the Headteacher Consultative Group and termly headteacher meetings there was too much variation in headteachers' understanding of the programme.

88. By analysing OFSTED reports the LEA identified many schools that were not using school development plans effectively. Development planning became the subject of focused visits by link inspectors in the Spring term 1999, with 95 per cent of schools involved. All inspectors had an *aide memoire* of issues to give consistency to the process, and a useful report has been produced on the main findings of these visits, with recommendations for future action. However, there has been too little feedback from the LEA on individual development plans and the quality of those seen by HMI remains too variable.

Support for early years education

89. The LEA support for education in the early years is satisfactory and improving. Within the EDP, improving the quality of education for four-year-olds is a priority. In conjunction with a draft early years development and childcare plan 2000-2001, there is a clear statement of intent in the meeting of requirements and in the raising and maintenance of standards in the education of four-year-olds. These plans complement the policy statement for three-year-olds. A value for money study of services for under fives has resulted in a detailed action plan with a timetable of improvements and changes to be completed by the end of this academic year.
90. Lincolnshire LEA has not been a high provider of nursery places in the past but the total number of places has increased significantly over the last 10 years. The LEA's commitment to support the work with younger children has been re-emphasised by the recent appointment of a designated adviser for early years. This is a timely appointment as it was apparent in visits to schools with nursery-age children that the amount of LEA specialist support for monitoring and advice is currently limited. Some early years strategies recently instigated by the LEA are already proving valuable. For instance, good use is made of the documentation recording the progress of a pupil when they pass from nursery provision into reception classes. Parents particularly value the portage service and there are good links between independent and voluntary providers of nursery education.

Recommendations:

In order to monitor and challenge schools more effectively:

- the work of link inspectors needs to be monitored and evaluated more effectively to improve its consistency;
- there should be a greater focus on those schools where available data indicates there is a clear need for monitoring and support; and
- the target-setting process needs to be more transparent, consistent and challenging.

In order to improve the provision of data and its use by schools:

- there should be a pupil database which records individual pupil attainment;
- there should be more support for headteachers and governors to develop their understanding and use of data to support school target setting and review; and
- data sent to schools to support the target-setting process should arrive in time for it to be of maximum use to the school.

In order to improve the support for ICT:

- a coherent strategy should be developed for ICT which combines an appropriate set of EDP priorities with a suitable plan for the delivery of NGfL;
- training plans should be determined which are targeted on raising standards and developing independence in learning; and
- schools should be supported in the development of individualised plans for the delivery of ICT.

In order to improve support for schools concern to the LEA:

- where the LEA has concerns about an aspect of the work of a school those concerns should be communicated unambiguously to the headteacher and governors;
- any support or intervention should have clear objectives for improvement, well-defined success criteria and be subject to regular review; and
- the LEA should monitor and evaluate more rigorously its own effectiveness in supporting schools which are of concern.

In order to improve support for school management:

- better analysis should be made of all available information, including the quality of the school development plan and any school self-evaluation to inform the LEA's view of the quality of management and governance in individual schools;
- the result of the analysis should be communicated clearly to the school and appropriate steps taken to bring about necessary improvements; and
- the quality of advice and challenge to schools on management issues provided or brokered by the LEA needs to be more consistent and of a higher standard.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

91. The Council has established a clear set of corporate priorities, including one with a specific focus on improving the quality of education. There has been an appropriate increasing emphasis on ensuring that directorates take account of, and help to achieve, the corporate priorities through their own service plans. The education and cultural services directorate performance plan now sets out the priorities and targets, linking these directly with the County Council's priorities. Overall, there is satisfactory and improving cohesion in policy and planning in relation to education. Officers and members demonstrate a high level of commitment and increasingly focused leadership.
92. The EDP relates well to the corporate priority concerning improving the quality of education. Moreover, the level of coherence between the corporate plans and all those related to education is improving generally. Good examples of 'joined up' thinking include an initiative to establish a rural action zone and the 'Boston Initiative', which successfully blends the Council's aspirations to improve standards in education with the drive to improve social inclusion.
93. The LEA has been successful in its promotion of good links with stakeholders, other partners and agencies. Good quality consultation procedures exist and joint ventures are appropriately evaluated. Consultation and liaison arrangements with the diocesan authorities are good. Co-operation with the police, health and social services, the TEC and the providers of careers advice is good. Collaboration with the police on matters allied to drug prevention and truancy are purposeful and an initiative involving SRB funding and a range of agencies has resulted in the West Lindsay Family Learning Network.
94. Financial decision-making is effective and well-structured, but is not sufficiently quick or transparent and is therefore an area of corporate working where there are weaknesses. Over half of the secondary schools and nearly a third of primary schools in the survey felt that consultation on the planning of the education budget was less than satisfactory. Dissatisfaction was greater amongst former grant maintained schools despite special explanatory meetings. Schools regard the meetings, which currently take place in the Autumn term, as informative rather than consultative. However, from 2000/2001 the Council appropriately introduced a medium-term budget planning cycle covering three financial years. This provides a clear financial framework within which service performance plans can be further developed and allows headteachers and governors to meet officers and members at a stage when they can influence priorities.
95. Schools do not receive formal notification of their budgets until shortly before the start of the new financial year. Apart from being able to access committee papers on the Intranet at the beginning of March 2000, no earlier indicative budgets are available to schools, making it difficult for them to plan confidently for the next academic year's staffing.

Management Services

96. The support provided through management services presents a generally positive picture with only minor areas for improvement. Headteachers were fully involved and consulted on further delegation under Fair Funding and the arrangements for buying back services are satisfactory. Detailed information on all services is contained conveniently in a single handbook. There is no information about alternative providers, but in most cases the service descriptions are sufficiently clear for schools to prepare their own specifications. Service standards, such as target response times, were not included in the original handbook. However, a general framework of standards covering all services has recently been agreed with the headteacher consultative group and service-specific standards are now being developed.
97. The full costs of each service are delegated, and are appropriately allocated through the lump sum and pupil-led elements of the formula. The very high buy-back rates by community schools in the first year of delegation have been sustained, reflecting overall satisfaction with the services.
98. Since April 2000, the majority of the Council's management support functions, including finance, personnel, property and ICT support for schools, have been provided by a private sector company. The partnership with Hyder Business Services is innovative, both in its scale and in the way in which it was tendered. Rather than responding to a conventional specification, companies were invited to propose changes that would achieve the Council's aims of lower costs, improved efficiency and enhanced services. Hyder is committed to a much needed capital investment in ICT systems at no cost to the Council as well as significant revenue savings. The company will also invest in a new business centre in Lincoln where most of the 750 staff that have transferred out of Council employment will work.
99. A condition of the contract was that the transfer should be seamless to clients; evidence from school visits suggests that this has been achieved. Appropriately, there will be consultative groups involving schools to help evaluate and develop services. A three-yearly benchmarking exercise and a profit-sharing arrangement are intended to ensure that the Council continues to receive Best Value.
100. Advice on the management of finance is good. Finance staff know their schools and work closely with personnel officers and the link inspector in supporting schools with budget difficulties. There is a comprehensive finance handbook including sample monitoring reports to governors and a spreadsheet to help schools plan their budgets two or three years in advance.
101. Until recently, the arrangements for the early identification of schools with potential deficits were unsatisfactory. They are now rigorous and effective. A high proportion of schools had deficit budgets at the end of 1998/99, including a quarter of secondary schools. A number of the headteachers interviewed who had been appointed in the last two years reported they had taken over budget difficulties or, in a few cases, substantial surpluses of which they believed the

LEA was unaware or was taking no action. Where problems are foreseen the school is contacted for further information and, if necessary, an action plan agreed. The LEA now has firm but flexible arrangements for helping schools recover from a deficit situation, usually within one or two years.

102. Budget monitoring at school level is hampered by out-dated accounting systems. The majority of community schools have chosen not to have their own bank account and receive monthly printouts from the Council's general ledger system. There are unacceptable delays and inaccuracies in the recording of payments and the need for a manual reconciliation with the school's local records. The Council recognises the shortcomings, but has been slow to address them. A new accounting system with on-line input to be implemented under the Hyder Partnership will be piloted in five schools from January 2001.
103. The support provided by Personnel Services is sound. A comprehensive handbook of statutory duties and guidance notes is provided to all schools. One hundred per cent of community schools buy back the additional support package, which includes a named, qualified officer for advice on personnel issues together with support for recruitment, contracts and a health and safety service. Many of the headteachers and governors interviewed during the inspection praised the quality of the advice they had received in difficult redundancy and competency cases. However, there were examples where this had been marred by failures in the follow-up of administrative tasks.
104. ICT support for school administration has lacked investment and strategic direction, and is poor overall. There is currently no central pupil database and no electronic transfer of data between schools and the LEA. The former grant maintained schools have adopted a range of packages, many of which the LEA help desk find hard to support. However, the new arrangements with Hyder offer hope that the ICT direction and support will improve. Schools should benefit from the Council-wide investment in ICT. School office computers provided by the LEA are currently being replaced and tendering for a central pupil database is already at an advanced stage.
105. Contract management and client support services for cleaning, grounds maintenance and catering are good. Schools visited provided a range of examples of appropriate user-focused support.
106. Given its rural nature and largely selective system, it is understandable that school transport is a major, and increasing, expense in Lincolnshire being 23 per cent higher per pupil than the County average and 4.5 per cent of the total expenditure on schools. The policy on entitlement is a little more generous than the statutory minimum, but appropriately reflects the Council's priority to support rural communities and its long-standing partnership with the Diocesan bodies to facilitate access to denominational schools. Procurement of transport is effectively co-ordinated by the highways and planning directorate whose safer routes to schools and other initiatives have been recognised as national good practice by the Government's school transport advisory group (STAG).

Recommendations:

In order to improve the provision of budget information:

- consultation on the budget should be earlier and more responsive, including indicative budgets ahead of final decisions.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

107. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN) is clearly articulated in a recently produced document and is suitably supplemented by a parent/partnership action plan. Nine priority areas are incorporated within the strategy and each is supported with a strategic objective. The priorities and objectives are appropriate and in company with the target-setting strategies outlined provide a suitable basis to support the work of schools. Special educational needs has not been made a separate priority within the EDP but elements are an integral and acceptable part of the priorities listed. The LEA is committed to maintaining a range of SEN provision in order to offer a choice to parents.
108. The schools visited identify well with the LEA's strategy for SEN. Good quality administrative handbooks are provided to schools, including one specifically for Early Years. The handbooks include helpful suggestions of strategies for differentiation and for classroom teamwork. A councillor carries specialist responsibility for SEN. Two school improvement officers have recently been appointed with specialisms in SEN. In conjunction with an education psychology service (EPS) which is within the standards division and an education adviser for special schools, all schools now have access to a good level of support.

Statutory obligations

109. The LEA complies with its statutory obligations including equal opportunities and disability legislation. A Management and Administration Statutory Functions Group has been established which is working on a suitable set of key objectives which are prioritised in a sensible fashion. A valuable initiative has been the recent training of independent parent supporters to help with the process of statementing. This is a desirable innovation but also necessary given that there is a small minority of parents who feel insufficiently involved in the process. The statutory responsibility to issue statements within 18 weeks is met, with close to 100 per cent issued within the time-scale. However, this excludes more than a third designated as allowable exceptions. Improved liaison is needed to ensure that advice from contributors for statements is received in good time so that the proportion of allowable exceptions is reduced. The annual review process for statements is sound, with the LEA triggering the dates for each school and making personnel available to attend review meetings where it is considered necessary.

Improvement and value for money

110. In the school survey, schools rated the support for SEN as generally satisfactory. Visits to schools confirmed this view, with many examples of good individual support being provided and evidence of a service providing good value for money. The LEA's audit carried out for the EDP showed that SEN provision and progress of pupils was satisfactory or good in most secondary

and the great majority of primary schools. OFSTED inspection evidence indicates that provision and progress is satisfactory or good in 93 per cent of primary and 77 per cent of secondary schools. Overall, pupils in unit provision in mainstream schools make good progress and pupils in the majority of special schools progress satisfactorily.

111. In 1999/2000 the LEA spent 14.1 per cent of its LSB on SEN, compared to 13.9 per cent by its statistical neighbours and a county average of 15 per cent. The LEA is aware that its 3.04 per cent of pupils with statements is high compared to statistical neighbours and national averages. A trend towards a decrease in numbers is identifiable but not yet significant. A similar decrease has occurred in the percentage of pupils in special schools but occupancy rates are still high at 37 per cent of all pupils with statements. The number of pupils identified in all county schools as having SEN is increasing by two per cent annually and reflects the increased awareness of needs.
112. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in mainstream schools and staff in special schools are generally well supported by the LEA. In the very few instances where support was less satisfactory it was invariably because difficulties had been experienced in co-ordinating the support of the various agencies with an involvement in SEN. However, joint work between mainstream and special schools is a weakness identified in the school survey and visits to schools indicated that there is scope for much more sharing of good practice. Training opportunities are well regarded although ICT training for SENCOs was considered poor. In one area of the authority a small number of parents expressed concerns about the procedures for the identification of SEN. In this there was a lack of understanding by parents of the processes involved and the LEA needs to do more to remedy this. The LEA was, however, taking reasonable steps to address the individual concerns made known by parents.
113. The full delegation of funds to schools for SEN has only recently taken place and the LEA has yet to monitor how effectively the monies are being spent. A reduction of 17 per cent in the number of SEN pupils educated out of county since 1996 has resulted from careful monitoring and costing and is part of an effective strategy to bring about good value for money. In the allocation of funding to statements of pupils in mainstream schools, elements of a differentiated system dependent upon the designation placed upon the SEN unit within the school still exist. This does result in pupils' entitlement being changed when transferring between schools and is counter to a SEN system which is generally considered equitable.
114. All special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) have been included in the target setting procedures at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4. Monitoring of pupil performance in mainstream and special schools is integral to the LEA's target-setting model. Suitable records currently exist but the early completion of the central pupil database would help with the tracking of children when they transfer between schools.

Recommendations:

In order to further improve special educational needs provision:

- the number of allowable exceptions preventing statements from being issued within 18 weeks should be reduced significantly.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places

115. The LEA's response to an overall surplus of places, combined with rising rolls and overcrowding, has been slow and fragmented. There is a high proportion of very small secondary schools. Having said that, the task of matching places to demand in a rural county with a largely selective system, with both mixed and single sex schools, and over 90 separate admission authorities, would present a challenge to any LEA.
116. The school organisation plan was agreed after appropriate consultation. In planning its places the LEA has also had regard to a local study by the external auditor which has been on-going since 1997. The LEA is working hard to update the school organisation plan to address inconsistencies which currently exist between the priorities identified in the plan, the local study and what is actually happening on the ground.
117. Progress in reducing infant class sizes is on schedule. In 1998/99, 65 schools had infant classes over 30 but by September 2000 it is intended that there will be none.
118. The accuracy of the LEA's forecasting has improved. Schools are consulted before forecasts are agreed, but the volatility of the housing market, uncertainties about the future of a number of large military bases, and rapid changes in the pattern of parental preferences in some areas have led to a cautious approach. No school has been opened or closed in the last five years, and there is heavy reliance on temporary classrooms.
119. The LEA has plans for three new primary schools to be funded over the next four years through a PFI scheme. The £12.8 million credit approval will also provide four new special schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties to replace two existing residential special schools. Poor liaison with some district Councils in the past has led to planning permission being granted for large housing estates without developers being required to contribute to the cost of new school provision. This situation is improving.
120. The priority for action on school places is in the secondary sector where the proportion of vacant places is well above the average for county LEAs. The proportion of secondary schools with more than 25 per cent surplus places is also high and has been increasing year on year, despite the overall increase in pupil numbers. At the same time, a third of secondary schools are overcrowded.
121. The situation in the primary sector is more satisfactory. The proportion of primary schools with more than 25 per cent surplus capacity is below the average for all county authorities. Some of the main areas of growth have been properly anticipated and are being addressed through the PFI scheme. A representative from the Service Children's Education Authority serves on the

admissions forum and provides information about movements of service families.

122. At the time of the inspection the County Council was belatedly up-dating its 17-year-old policy statement on small schools. The draft statement helpfully sets out criteria for deciding when schools will be reviewed. However, the minimum size for primary schools is expressed in terms of classes rather than pupils and is insufficiently specific. The policy statement is silent on the position of small sixth forms despite nearly half of sixth forms having fewer than 150 students, the minimum recommended by the Audit Commission.
123. Asset management is a strength. The standard of school premises, structural maintenance, technical advice and the management of building projects were all rated significantly higher than the average of other LEAs in the school survey. Prior to delegation, the balance of expenditure was strongly in favour of preventative rather than reactive maintenance, reflecting a well-established five-yearly cycle of work at each school.
124. Progress on the asset management plan is satisfactory. The local policy statement is concise, but comprehensive, outlining an appropriate partnership approach between LEA, dioceses, schools and the DfEE whilst recognising the LEA's overall responsibility for maintaining the plan. The condition survey was completed on time. The property division reacted quickly to the concerns of a number of schools about the quality of some surveys undertaken by private contractors. At the time of the inspection, work on the suitability survey was just beginning. A self-evaluation approach will require schools to make a considerable input, although arrangements have thoughtfully been made for surveyors to undertake the work in small primary schools where headteachers have a heavy teaching commitment.

Admissions

125. Given the number of admission authorities and the mix of secondary schools, the arrangements for admissions are satisfactory overall, but with some important areas for improvement. The LEA has successfully delegated responsibility for admissions to community and controlled schools to governing bodies. For secondary transfer, the LEA co-ordinates the distribution and return of all preference forms effectively so that timely admission decisions can be taken by individual governing bodies. An active admissions forum has made very good progress in securing agreement to a common admissions timetable, although a small number of foundation secondary schools in one area continue to operate an earlier closing date.
126. The timetable for secondary transfer is satisfactory, apart from grammar School assessment appeals, which are not completed until close to the end of the summer term. Appeals are effectively managed by the Council. The proportion of county and controlled schools appeals in 1997/98 was low compared to the national average and to other LEAs with mainly selective systems.

127. Admissions information is attractively presented but has shortcomings. The main text in the booklet has received recognition for its clarity. However, by combining primary and secondary schools in one volume and reproducing the admission criteria for all 91 foundation and aided schools in full, the volume of detail is large and potentially confusing for parents. Popular schools are listed, but with no indication of the scale or pattern of previous over-subscription. There are no useful maps and important information about school transport is published separately. A supplementary booklet about secondary transfer is poorly produced and adds little to the main document.
128. Where selection occurs at the end of Key Stage 2, Year 6 pupils take common verbal reasoning tests organised by a voluntary consortium of grammar school headteachers. Differences in the admission criteria are outside the remit of the LEA but mean that, in practice, entry standards vary between schools, including those between single sex grammar schools in the same town.

Social exclusion

129. The support for children in public care; for pupils of a minority ethnic background including Travellers; for attendance; and for the health, safety and welfare of pupils is generally good. The County Council's four year plan (1998-2001) for education and cultural services includes a clear commitment to improve educational access and participation. Revisions are being made in the behaviour support plan (BSP) to link more effectively with the EDP's focus on improving the capacity of schools to promote and support social inclusion. The LEA's principles for social inclusion are understood by the schools. Effective arrangements exist to support schools in dealing with behaviour and avoiding exclusions. All pupils who are excluded or are out of school for other reasons are known and receive at least the minimum requirement of five hours alternative educational provision.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

130. The LEA carefully monitors children who are excluded and out of school for other reasons and currently provides a satisfactory if minimal level of alternative provision. In the year to June 2000, 133 pupils had been permanently excluded from the authority's schools. Of these, 64 had been integrated into schools within an acceptable time frame through locally devised schemes of transfer or LEA involvement, and a further 12 after a period of receiving alternative tuition. The LEA has four pupil referral units located in regional centres across the authority which cater for secondary age pupils and those close to the end of Year 6 in primary schools. Several initiatives have been supported to reduce exclusions, including home-school liaison working with disaffected 7 to 11-year-olds and a range of work-related learning packages for pupils at Key Stage 4. These are reported by schools visited to be successful.
131. In addition to excluded pupils, a further 140 pupils are receiving alternative tuition 'for other reasons'. The LEA is seeking to improve the quality and consistency of its provision of education otherwise than at school as, at

present, too many receive only the minimum entitlement or close to it in the number of hours of tuition each week. The LEA has a very challenging target to meet if it is to comply with the designated minimum hours by 2001.

Learning support service

132. This service is effective and provides a good level of support to schools and individual pupils. It is now entirely funded by income from schools' delegated funds. A four-year plan with objectives has been identified and a useful handbook prepared and distributed. Whilst a clear statement is made in the documentation about raising literacy standards, there is no parallel mention of numeracy. The learning support service provides criteria for the support of the gifted and most able children although the evidence from school visits is that this provision is limited because of the small number of personnel involved.

Educational psychology service

133. Support for schools by the educational psychology service (EPS) is well co-ordinated, highly regarded and effective. There are clearly stated strategic objectives and service targets. The service is now an integral part of the LEA's Standards Branch and was the subject of a useful Best Value review. In the 20 schools visited where the EPS was an emphasis, there was almost universal appreciation of the support provided and good evidence of a service providing value for money. Many examples were quoted of pupils being particularly well-served through one-to-one support and through the system of supported annual reviews. Whilst good planning of the available time of the 17 people who make up the service has maximised the time spent in schools, three of the schools visited did comment upon the lack of consistency in the performance of their educational psychologist.

Attendance

134. The LEA provides a satisfactory level of support for attendance. Attendance levels in Lincolnshire are in line with the LEA's statistical neighbours and marginally better than national averages. Rates of unauthorised absence are below national averages and on a par with statistical neighbours. However, rates of authorised absence are marginally higher than statistical neighbours despite being better than national figures. The LEA is rightly concerned that authorised absences have risen since 1995/96 from 8.8 per cent to 12.1 per cent. A reduction of unauthorised absences by a third by 2002 is a challenging target set for the LEA by the DfEE.
135. The education welfare service (EWS) has a good service plan; a model school attendance policy was formulated in 1999 after consultation with schools; and schools are being appropriately challenged to seek to combat non-attendance through a recently produced attendance plan. The work of the education welfare officers (EWOs) is valued by the schools and where reservations were expressed by schools visited it was usually due to changes, sometimes quite frequent, in the personnel providing support. Clear policies and protocols have

been established but the responsibilities of the EWOs, when working with schools, needs to be re-emphasised particularly for the schools where attendance levels are poor. Home visits and the use of prosecutions against non-attendance have been successful elements within the armoury of the EWS. It is very apparent however, that more use could be made by schools of attendance data to identify shortcomings in curricula provision and to provide pupils with good reasons to maximise their own attendance.

Behaviour support

136. LEA support for behaviour is good. The existing behaviour support plan suitably highlights the developments which are taking place within the authority and serves to illustrate examples of good and interesting practice. The aims outlined are translated into appropriate objectives and actions. Schools understand the priorities of the Plan and the links with the LEA strategies to promote good attendance and social inclusion and to reduce exclusions. A revision to the plan is in early draft form. Two main priorities are identified in this and duly reflect the specific concerns of the DfEE in a recent letter to all LEAs. These priorities are: improving the capacity of schools to support pupils with behavioural and/or attendance difficulties, and secondly to ensure that those pupils not in a school setting receive full-time education.
137. OFSTED inspections of both primary and secondary schools show that the quality of behaviour is on a par with the LEA's statistical neighbours and above national averages. In the school survey, nursery and primary schools generally rated the LEA's support for behaviour better than satisfactory. Secondary schools were generally less positive in their responses and special schools were critical. Visits to primary schools showed that the strategies being adopted by members of the behaviour support team (BST) were appropriate in dealing with individual pupils although approaches suggested which involved groups of pupils or whole classes were sometimes unrealistic. The secondary and special schools visited had made comparatively little use of the BST and the survey responses were felt to reflect the inability of the LEA always to find solutions to the more intractable problems that are referred to them.
138. The LEA has been the instigator of a number of valuable innovations designed to support schools experiencing behavioural difficulties, particularly with pupils in Key Stage 4. The making available of Standards Fund monies for an alternative curriculum based upon work experience is an example of one scheme which is meeting the needs of disaffected 15- and 16-year-olds.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

139. The LEA endeavours to meet its responsibilities for safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of pupils and provides schools with clear information and guidance. Schools are appreciative of the support provided by the LEA for health and safety. Guidance and training on child protection procedures is comprehensive and is also well regarded by the schools.

Children in public care

140. The LEA fulfils the current statutory requirements with regard to children in public care (CPC) and does so satisfactorily. However, it has yet to put in place the full infrastructure to meet future requirements. A suitable set of documentation covers existing practice and there is evidence of an appropriate register although not yet a comprehensive database. The LEA has identified a 'named officer' for CPC but schools have not yet been instructed to identify a 'named teacher'. There is good liaison with social services on all matters associated with CPC. It is the LEA's intention to review their arrangements for CPC in the near future when it is planned to set targets for these children.

Minority ethnic and Traveller children

141. The LEA provides a good level of support for ethnic minority children. Lincolnshire has a small proportion of ethnic minority pupils in its schools (1.3 per cent), but 27 per cent of schools receive support for English as an additional language (EAL). Although the numbers of pupils are small, 59 mother tongues are spoken. The support provided is highly valued by the schools. Minority Ethnic and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) action planning is sensible and thoughtful and gives appropriate priority to staff training and awareness-raising as well as on support for under-achievers. In response to a need identified in the revised EDP, useful guidelines have been provided to schools on the involvement of ethnic minority pupils in literacy and numeracy lessons. The small numbers in each individual ethnic group have meant that (with the exception of Chinese and Indian pupils), achievement targets for these groups have had to be subsumed into the county's general targets. The EMTAG management group sets individual targets for the pupils they work with directly and liaise with schools in the setting of that school's targets for ethnic minority pupils. In 1999, Chinese and Indian pupils in the LEA's schools met their GCSE targets.

142. A similar emphasis has been placed upon the provision of support for Traveller pupils with outcomes that are at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Well detailed and appropriate strategies have been devised to meet needs and some particularly innovative ideas have been developed in the work with these children and their families. EMTAG supports schools in the setting of targets for these pupils in a similar fashion to ethnic minority pupils. In 1999, Traveller pupils just failed to meet their GCSE points targets; an average of 16 points was achieved against a target of 18. Schools visited were appreciative of the in-school support provided for Traveller pupils but there were examples where a more explicit job description would have helped the school to fully understand what could be asked of the person providing support.

Education against racism

143. The LEA has made an appropriate response to the Stephen Lawrence enquiry report and has reviewed its provision for action against racism. However, not all schools have received sufficient support in preparing their own policies to

address the issue of racism and LEA monitoring procedures need strengthening.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the provision of school places and admissions:

- the school organisation plan should be updated particularly in respect of the secondary sector to provide a single agreed action plan with a realistic timetable and adequate staffing to address the outstanding issues in a firm, but measured way.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to monitor and challenge schools more effectively:

- the work of link inspectors needs to be monitored and evaluated more effectively to improve its consistency;
- there should be a greater focus on those schools where available data indicates there is a clear need for monitoring and support; and
- the target-setting process needs to be more transparent, consistent and challenging.

In order to improve the provision of data and its use by schools:

- there should be a pupil database which records individual pupil attainment;
- there should be more support for headteachers and governors to develop their understanding and use of data to support school target setting and review; and
- data sent to schools to support the target-setting process should arrive in time for it to be of maximum use to the school.

In order to improve the support for ICT:

- a coherent strategy should be developed for ICT which combines an appropriate set of EDP priorities with a suitable plan for the delivery of NGfL;
- training plans should be determined which are targeted on raising standards and developing independence in learning; and
- schools should be supported in the development of individualised plans for the delivery of ICT.

In order to improve support for schools concern to the LEA:

- where the LEA has concerns about an aspect of the work of a school those concerns should be communicated unambiguously to the headteacher and governors;
- any support or intervention should have clear objectives for improvement, well-defined success criteria and be subject to regular review; and
- the LEA should monitor and evaluate more rigorously its own effectiveness in supporting schools which are of concern.

In order to improve support for school management:

- better analysis should be made of all available information, including the quality of the school development plan and any school self-evaluation to inform the LEA's view of the quality of management and governance in individual schools;
- the result of the analysis should be communicated clearly to the school and appropriate steps taken to bring about necessary improvements; and
- the quality of advice and challenge to schools on management issues provided or brokered by the LEA needs to be more consistent and of a higher standard.

In order to improve the provision of budget information:

- consultation on the budget should be earlier and more responsive, including indicative budgets ahead of final decisions.

In order to further improve special educational needs provision:

- the number of allowable exceptions preventing statements from being issued within 18 weeks should be reduced significantly.

In order to improve the provision of school places and admissions:

- the school organisation plan should be updated particularly in respect of the secondary sector to provide a single agreed action plan with a realistic timetable and adequate staffing to address the outstanding issues in a firm, but measured way.

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