

Inspection report
LEICESTERSHIRE
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: January 2003

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Basic information

Name of LEA:	Leicestershire Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	County Hall Glenfield Leicester LE3 8RF
Lead inspector:	Daryl Agnew HMI
Date of inspection:	January 2003

Introduction

1. This inspection of Leicestershire local education authority (LEA) was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in September 1998.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and teachers; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and partners also participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier OFSTED/Audit Commission report on this LEA published in January 1999. A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to all schools, and its results considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 69 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's self-evaluation.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria, (and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted), can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numeric grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numeric grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report which comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

4. Some of the grades are used in the 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.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of all aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc, whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

6. Leicestershire LEA was established in its present form in 1997, following local government reorganisation. The authority serves a largely rural county which has less cultural diversity and is more economically advantaged than is the case nationally. It receives one of the lowest levels of funding compared to other LEAs but this has been offset to some extent by the council's consistent commitment to education in the form of supplementary funding.

7. Generally, pupils' attainment is at least in line with the national average, and often above both the national average and that of similar authorities. Performance at Key Stage 3 is a particular strength where results are above the national average and in the case of science, are well above the national average. However, this performance is not sustained at Key Stage 4 where results are broadly in line with the national average. Over a two-year period, the LEA has developed in partnership with schools a clearly defined local strategy for Key Stage 4 to address this relative underachievement which has now become a national priority in the current education development plan.

8. The previous inspection in November 1998 did not cover all of the functions of the local education authority. At that time, Leicestershire was judged satisfactory, and this remains the case. The LEA fulfils many important functions very well, particularly in relation to school improvement where substantial improvements have been made. There is strong leadership and management of national strategies to raise standards of attainment. Together, these initiatives form an increasingly coherent and effective approach to school improvement which reflects the needs of the local context. Significant improvements in the production and use of performance data have enabled the LEA to provide more rigorous and effective challenge for schools. Nonetheless, there remain some weaknesses in special educational needs (SEN) and aspects of social inclusion which reduce the LEA's effectiveness in supporting schools.

Strengths

The LEA's support for literacy and numeracy is very good. The following functions are good:

- the LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention;
- the leadership of and expertise of staff in services to support school improvement, together with their deployment;
- support for raising standards at Key Stage 3;
- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers; and
- property services.

Weaknesses

The LEA's strategy for SEN is poor and the following functions are unsatisfactory:

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- the allocation of resources to priorities;
 - the value for money of the LEA's provision for special educational needs;
 - the strategy to promote social inclusion; and
 - support for behaviour at school.

9. Relationships between the LEA and schools are generally positive. The LEA is strongly committed to autonomous schools and to working in partnership with them, and there are appropriate arrangements in place to support this partnership. There has been very effective consultation and collaboration with schools in the development and implementation of the strategy for school improvement. However, this partnership working has been less effective in relation to the strategies for SEN and social inclusion, and in particular, to the provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and the LEA's support for behaviour. Schools do not feel that they have been involved sufficiently in the development or review of policy. Allied to this are some strategic weaknesses in the LEA's allocation of resources to priorities, whereby key developments for the authority such as universal 4+ provision, funding for the SEN strategy and the asset management plan have not been adequately resourced. In addition, there has been no regular, systematic review of the funding formula and it is generally poorly understood by schools.

10. Schools are rightly looking to the LEA to provide clear leadership and vision and are sometimes frustrated by the LEA's lack of consistency and confidence in some aspects of its leadership role. While the LEA demonstrates strong and determined leadership in relation to the school improvement strategy, this has not been the case in the area of SEN where consultation, communication and decision-making have been less effective. It is now incumbent upon both the LEA and schools to ensure that any weaknesses in partnership working are fully addressed in light of the LEA's newly published communications policy.

11. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory but the pace of change and development has been inconsistent and at times, too slow. The LEA has made good progress in its strategy for school improvement and the impact in schools has been significant. However, the strategies for SEN and social inclusion remain under developed. The highly satisfactory performance in most areas of service provision outweighs the weaknesses in strategic management identified in this report. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2002, gave the education service two stars for current performance which reflects to a large extent the good performance of schools, early years settings and the adult education service. The assessment also gave the education service three stars (the highest category) for its capacity to make further improvement. The findings of the inspection team based on up to date evidence in the field however do not fully reflect this assessment of the LEA's capacity to improve. Senior officers and elected members need to provide greater clarity of direction for schools on a number of strategic issues identified in this report in order for further progress to be made. They have already demonstrated their ability to manage change successfully in some areas. The LEA has satisfactory capacity to make further improvements and the experience of effective partnership working with schools on which to build the necessary strategic developments for the authority.

Section 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement

Context

12. Leicestershire county council was established in its present form in 1997, following local government reorganisation when Rutland and the City of Leicester became unitary authorities. Leicestershire is a largely rural county with a relatively stable population of around 611,200 but which is set to rise by three per cent in the next ten years. There is less cultural diversity or disadvantage than is the case nationally, other than in the four main centres of population which are market towns. Unemployment in the county at around 2.1 per cent is below the national average of 3.2 per cent.

13. The area is generally affluent although a small number of wards are amongst the most deprived 20 per cent of wards nationally.¹ The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national averages in both primary and secondary schools. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs at secondary schools (3.6 per cent) is well below the national average, and at 2.3 per cent is below that for primary schools. The proportion of primary and secondary aged pupils with statements who attend special schools is well below the national figure.

14. Currently 8.6 per cent of the school population is of minority ethnic origin, compared with 12.9 per cent nationally. Since the previous inspection in 1998, the county has become the place of residence for approximately 400 asylum seekers. In the previous academic year, 2001/2002, 53 children from asylum seeker and refugee families were educated in mainstream schools.

15. Leicestershire LEA maintains 289 schools: one nursery, eight infant, six junior, 213 primary, 36 high schools, 15 upper schools, three 11-19 secondary schools and seven special schools. Primary and secondary schools vary in the age of admission and transfer with pupils aged 4+/rising 5 to 10+/11+ in primary schools; pupils aged 10+/11 to 14 in high schools; and pupils aged 14-19 mainly in upper schools. The council has an objective to provide a common 4+ admission policy for all children. There are currently 56 primary schools with less than 100 pupils on roll, two of which are infant schools. Nine upper schools have been awarded specialist college status. There are five Beacon schools, two of which are primary, two high schools and an independent special school. Four previously grant maintained schools have now become foundation schools.

16. The council has a longstanding commitment to the provision of community education through community colleges and centres. Currently, seven primary, 11 high and 14 upper schools are designated as community colleges or centres. At the time of the inspection, the outcomes of a Best Value review (BVR) of Youth and Community Services was awaiting a formal response from members.

¹ The Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) index of multiple deprivation 2000.

17. Nursery provision for both three and four year-olds has increased significantly since the last inspection. There has been an increase in the places provided by the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Early years education is now available for all four year-olds whose parents require it. Currently, 63 per cent of three year-olds attend pre-school provision. From April 2003, part-time funded nursery education will be available for all three year-olds.

Performance

18. Overall performance is at least in line with national averages, and often above both the national average and that found in similar authorities.²

19. Ofsted inspections and baseline assessment data indicate that pupils' attainment on entry to full time education is better than average. In 2001, at the end of Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils attaining Level 2 and above was in line with the national average for reading and writing, and above the national average in mathematics. These results were in line with those for similar authorities. At the end of Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in 2001 in English, mathematics and science was above the national average and in line with similar authorities. At the higher level of 5 or above, their performance was in line with the national average.

20. Performance at Key Stage 3 is a strength. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above in English and mathematics is above the national average and that for similar authorities; and in science, is well above. Pupils also perform well at the higher level of 6 or above in mathematics, where results are above national and statistical neighbour averages, and in science, where the results are well above the national average.

21. The rates of improvement at each key stage are broadly in line with national trends except at Key Stage 1 where the rate is below the national trend and well below that of similar authorities. At Key Stage 2, the rate of improvement in English and mathematics is broadly in line with national trends and above that for similar authorities. For science, the rate is below the national trend but above that for similar authorities.

22. At the end of Key Stage 4 in 2001, in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), 49.9 per cent of pupils achieved five or more grades A*-C which is in line with both the national average and that of similar authorities. The average point score and the percentage achieving at least one GCSE at grade A*-G were also in line with similar LEAs and the national average.

23. Ofsted inspections indicate that the proportion of Leicestershire schools that are very good or good overall is in line with the national average for primary schools and well above that for secondary schools. Attendance is above the national figure in primary schools and in line with that for secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is well below the figure for primary schools and broadly in line with that for secondary schools. The rate of permanent

² Leicestershire's statistical neighbours are: Cheshire, Derbyshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, East Sussex, Essex, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire.

exclusion is broadly in line with the national figure for primary and secondary schools but rose by 32 per cent in the year 2001-2002.

24. Unvalidated data for 2002 indicates that overall performance continues to be at least in line with the national average and similar authorities. Furthermore, at Key Stage 2 in English and science and at Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics attainment is above the national average. Results in all subjects at Key Stage 3 are also above those of similar authorities. At GCSE, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* - C grades has increased by 2.8 percentage points on the previous year.

Funding

25. Leicestershire's education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) has consistently been in the bottom five per cent of authorities in the country. However, equally consistent, has been the council's commitment to education in the form of supplementary funding. In the current financial year, as in the recent past, this has been around 4.5 per cent in excess of SSA, or around £9.7 million.

26. Within the education budget, Leicestershire spends more than average on non-school services such as adult and community education, and the youth service. The Local Schools Budget (LSB) is £2835 per pupil on average in Leicestershire, compared to £2965 per pupil on average in shire counties and £3125 per pupil nationally.

27. The following table shows Leicestershire's retained funding in most of the main categories, compared to others for the 2001/02 financial year, as provided by the DfES:

Fair Category	Funding	Leicestershire £ per pupil	Shire Counties £ per pupil	National £ per pupil
Central administration		51	43	48
Other strategic management		22	24	26
Special educational needs		141	96	103
School improvement		31	26	28
Access		49	40	48
Transport		102	98	78
Standards fund		34	54	67

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/03.

28. In total, Leicestershire spends considerably more on centrally provided services than the average county and nationally, although some of this, on transport for example, is a

reflection of the sparsity of the county's population. As a result of the low SSA and high central spending, Leicestershire has one of the lowest Individual Schools Budgets (ISB) in the country:

	Leicestershire £ per pupil	Shire £ per pupil	counties National £ per pupil
Primary ISB	1,884	2,074	2,223
Secondary ISB	2,680	2,777	2,940
Special ISB	12,041	11,147	12,055

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002/03.

29. This year, for the first time, Leicestershire did not meet the government's target for 87 per cent delegation. At its current level of 84.7 per cent of LSB, there are only two councils which delegate a smaller proportion of the LSB than Leicestershire.

30. Higher than average revenue contributions to capital projects, high levels of contributions from developers, and increasing amounts from capital receipts have added to the streams of funding from grants and borrowing to increase investment from £6million in 1999 to over £21million in this year. Additional resources via the various grant streams are very limited in Leicestershire because of the relatively good socio-economic indicators. Although appropriate efforts are made to access funding streams, the amount of grant income for the county is largely formula driven.

Council structure

31. There have been major changes in the county council and its governance since the last inspection in 1998. Following the county council elections in June 2001, the council consists of 54 councillors: 28 Conservative, 15 Labour, 10 Liberal Democrat and one Independent. This is the first time in 20 years that a single party has achieved an overall majority and formed the administration of the council.

32. The council modernised its structures for political decision-making in line with national policy and piloted the leader and cabinet model from September 1999. The new constitution was fully implemented in April 2001. The executive has delegated powers of decision making and consists of a nine-member cabinet, including a leader. There are five scrutiny committees, including one for education, and a scrutiny commission to oversee and co-ordinate their work and other cross-cutting areas of council work.

33. The council has restructured its senior management since the last inspection, thereby reducing the number of departments from eleven to six and the size of the corporate management team. Within the education department, the director's management team comprises the director and four assistant director posts for planning and resources, pupil/student support, school/college support and school/college effectiveness. A restructuring of the department is imminent in order to improve its capacity for strategic management. This restructuring includes the creation of a new group of senior officers part of

whose remit is policy development. This increase in the strategic capacity of the department has been built appropriately into the education strategic plan for 2002-2007.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

34. The LEA's strategy for school improvement was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, which occurred before the requirement to produce an Education Development Plan (EDP). The work undertaken by the LEA immediately before and following local government reorganisation had placed it in a good position at that time to meet and develop its new statutory responsibilities.

35. The LEA's second EDP (2002 – 2007) is highly satisfactory. The audit draws upon an appropriate and extensive range of data and includes a satisfactory and informative evaluation of the first EDP except in the area of cost effectiveness. The LEA has analysed strengths and weaknesses in educational standards, quality of teaching and management and efficiency to inform its proposals for the five national priorities and to justify the inclusion of two local priorities; maintaining progress at points of transfer and transition, and the recruitment and retention of teachers and headteachers.

36. The current EDP priorities are:

- raising attainment in the Foundation Stage and in primary schools, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 3;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 4;
- narrowing the attainment gap/tackling underachievement;
- support for schools causing concern;
- maintaining progress at transfer and transition; and
- supporting the LEA's programme of school improvement through establishing a strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers and headteachers.

37. The 2004 targets for schools are very challenging, particularly the Key Stage 2 target for English and mathematics which require a nine and ten per cent increase respectively over the next two years. The LEA has responded appropriately to any gaps between LEA and aggregated school targets and this is reflected in the development plans for literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3. The use of pupil-level data has improved the LEA's capacity to both challenge schools and to target support more effectively. The LEA is able to demonstrate that these very challenging targets are achievable.

38. The council has recently secured a local public service agreement (LPSA) which includes enhanced targets for education in a number of areas. These include the percentage of pupils gaining 5+A*-C grades, the percentage achieving Level 5 in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, the attainment of all pupils in special schools, and improving the outcomes, attendance and attainment of looked after children. These targets are challenging and appropriately reflect the priorities and concerns of the LEA and schools.

39. The school improvement programme has many strengths. Links with other relevant plans are clear and their intended impact on the EDP is identified. Similarly the contribution of priorities and activities to national themes, such as the underachievement of boys, is made clear. Success criteria are well matched to actions and targets and are presented as measurable 'expected outcomes'. Plans for raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils or those with special educational needs are satisfactory. LEA support is well targeted at identified groups of schools, teachers and pupils, and the criteria used for identification are appropriate and explicit. The plan has some weaknesses in a minority of priorities and activities. Occasionally, intended actions are vague and it is not clear what the LEA is going to do or how it is going to do it. For example in Priority 4: narrowing the attainment gap/tackling underachievement, actions include to 'promote inclusive practices' or 'improve the integration of transient pupils'. Indicative resources for each priority are clearly set out but the cost of each activity, and the scale of some activities, are unclear.

40. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are highly satisfactory. Each of the seven priorities and related activities has a senior officer assigned as a priority manager to monitor progress and report on a six-monthly basis. The EDP liaison group, chaired by the director of education and including headteacher, governor and union representatives, receives updates on progress on a monthly basis. The cabinet and education scrutiny committee each receive suitably detailed progress reports on a six-monthly basis.

41. In 2002, the LEA did not achieve its Key Stage 2 targets for English and mathematics. At Key Stage 4, the LEA did not achieve two of its three targets at GCSE. However, the LEA achieved an average point score of 41, two points above its target of 39. The target for reducing permanent exclusions was exceeded but targets for reducing unauthorised absence were not achieved. Implementation of the current EDP in its first year has been highly satisfactory, particularly for priorities related to national strategies and for raising standards at Key Stage 4. Progress on implementation has been slower in relation to the development of the recruitment and retention strategy and on aspects of SEN and inclusion. The annual EDP conference involving headteachers, governors and elected members provides an important means of feedback for the LEA, and there is clear evidence of how the LEA has listened to and responded to their views.

The allocation of resources to priorities

42. The previous inspection report stated that departmental planning required more rigorous processes to ensure that resources were adequately aligned to priorities. Despite some innovative work, and some clear targeting of resources at the detailed level, there are still some important strategic weaknesses which result in unsatisfactory performance in this area.

43. Over many years, education has been a clearly stated priority of the council and has demonstrated such by supplementing the SSA by significant amounts. However, in the absence of a medium term financial plan, resources have not been directed to effect a set of clearly articulated objectives across the council as a whole. Steps are being taken to address this, and the first medium term financial plan for Leicestershire is about to be agreed by the council, to reflect the objectives published in the council's medium term strategic objectives.

44. Within the education budget there are some clear examples of consistent targeting of resources to council priorities. Commitments to the youth service, adult and community education, school improvement services and providing capital resources from revenue, all show higher than average expenditure, in some cases over a long period. Furthermore, some more recent developments such as the Quality Enhancement Budget, demonstrate an innovative approach to targeting scarce resources to 'pump-prime' developments and gain demonstrable benefits in school improvement, for relatively modest expenditure. In other respects, however, performance is unsatisfactory. Although the universal 4+ provision is a council priority, progress is slow as resources to complete the project have not been identified. Similarly, the strategy for SEN does not have an integral financial plan, and there is no agreed plan to bridge the identified gap between needs and resources in the otherwise well-constructed asset management plan.

45. Financial targets have consistently been met, except for the current year when the LEA was unable to meet the 87 per cent delegation target set by central government. The explanation, accepted by the DfES, was that schools had, after proper consultation, asked for the money to support SEN statements not to be delegated. Delegation of this funding would have enabled the target to be reached. However, the LEA had only arrived at such a position because of the incremental effect of decisions to spend more than average on a range of services such as youth and community, outdoor education and SEN transport, which over time, had reduced the cash available for delegation. These are decisions totally within the proper remit of the council, and appropriate consultation has been undertaken for each. However, insufficient clarity about service priorities has resulted in each decision being taken without due regard to its effects on other areas of operation. Stakeholders have therefore been asked to comment on individual issues without sufficient knowledge of the bigger picture.

Recommendation

In order for stakeholders to reach an informed and agreed position on the most appropriate level of delegation of funding for Leicestershire:

- all items of central expenditure should be subject to consultation to establish their priority and their level of funding .

46. The formula for funding mainstream schools is unsatisfactory. A needs-led analysis of the funding formula for mainstream schools was carried out prior to the previous inspection, and it has usefully informed the distribution of some of the revenue growth in the current year. A well-received review of the formula for special schools has also been undertaken recently. However, there has been no regular, systematic review of the formula and as a result of unconnected, issue-driven modifications, the formula is outdated, poorly understood by schools, and has as its main aim, a replication of actual costs.

Recommendation**In order to improve transparency and effectiveness in the allocation of resources to schools:**

- establish a regular and systematic review of all elements of the funding formula for schools.

47. In the technical areas of budget setting, monitoring and control, the LEA performs well, with planned expenditure normally matching what is actually spent. Some demand-led areas, such as statements of special educational needs, are subject to consistent overspending, but regular monitoring and reporting ensures that variations are known and acted on in a timely way. The external auditor has also judged performance in this respect to be sound. Monitoring of school budgets is satisfactory, balances and deficits overall are within acceptable limits, and where they are not, robust action is taken. Governors are required to submit plans if the school balance exceeds five per cent of income and the LEA ensures that they do this.

Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value

48. This aspect was not inspected at the time of the previous inspection. The structures for achieving continuous improvement, including Best Value, are satisfactory.

49. The recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the council reported on the lack of a coherent approach to continuous improvement, although it was acknowledged that several components of an effective performance management culture were evident. The sharper focus of the medium term corporate strategy has enabled clearer priorities to become the basis for a developing performance management system, with more secure links to service plans. Although there is still some way to go, things are moving in the right direction. Furthermore, senior staff from all council departments are committed to a major, innovative project called 'Better Access to Better Service Information', which is aimed at improving information and access to all council services for residents.

50. Across the education department, improvement systems are more securely established and the quality of performance management is improving. Service plans are clearly linked to corporate priorities and demonstrate the effects of service user views. These are garnered in a variety of ways such as through user groups and surveys, and the LEA is beginning to approach the utilisation of the results in a reasonably systematic way.

51. Most education services have developed their own service standards, and development of these can be traced back to the views of service users. This is a highly satisfactory system. However, reporting back to users on performance against these standards is not consistent.

52. The Best Value reviews completed to date have been carried out satisfactorily, although external challenge has not always been used. However, improvements have been or should be secured, such as better customer focus and care at a reduced cost, resulting from the Best Value review of special needs transport. The department has accepted the need to

broaden the focus of its reviews, and those planned for the near future are based on themes such as school improvement and access. The external auditor has given an unqualified approval to the Best Value Performance Plan. The plan is well-structured around the council's corporate objectives and provides a clear perspective of the council's performance. The education priority within the plan includes an appropriate range of education performance indicators reflecting local policy priorities and targets within the EDP. Elected members receive regular half-yearly progress reports on performance against Best Value performance indicators and commitments, including any future corrective action to be taken.

53. The education scrutiny committee receives a full and appropriate range of progress reports against key educational targets, including a detailed annual report in the autumn term on all areas of schools' performance, together with a summary of available performance indicators. Progress on the LEA's post Ofsted action plan has also been regularly reviewed by elected members. An external evaluation of the LEA's progress against targets in the plan was commissioned in 2002 and involved surveys and focus groups of headteachers. Overall the LEA's progress was judged satisfactory, with particular strengths in relation to the LEA's strategy for school improvement. This reflects the judgements of the inspection team.

54. The education department has established an effective system of self-evaluation using the Ofsted evaluation criteria but the overall quality is inconsistent. The quality of the self evaluation is good in relation to services focused specifically on raising standards of attainment and supporting school improvement. This self evaluation reflects a good awareness of strengths and weaknesses based on the effective use of management information and feedback from schools. However, the LEA's self evaluation in relation to SEN and aspects of social inclusion, such as behaviour support, is unsatisfactory and demonstrates insufficient awareness and understanding of strategic weaknesses.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

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

55. The previous inspection report noted strengths in the LEA's support for school improvement but also identified the need to define, in consultation with schools, its role in providing not only support, but challenge and intervention, particularly in those schools which appeared at that time to be coasting. Since the 1998 inspection, the LEA has made good progress, and particularly in the last twelve months. The LEA is strongly committed to autonomous and self-evaluating institutions, and has worked effectively in partnership with schools to embed self-evaluation processes that complement the LEA's monitoring role. This work has been further strengthened by the widespread development of the 'Investors in People' programme in schools, supported by the LEA's advisory and inspection service. The establishment of the statistics and information unit, and the production of better quality performance data have enabled the LEA to adopt a more robust approach to challenge and intervention. However, although the systems to identify under-performing schools have improved, the LEA has been slow to recognise the intensity of support required in a small number of schools. As a consequence, some have been slow to improve or occasionally have declined further.

56. A major strength of the LEA's support for school improvement is the strong leadership and management of national strategies and their implementation within the Leicestershire context. They have been further enhanced by the successful early introduction of the LEA's own Key Stage 4 strategy, now one of the national priorities within the EDP. Together, these initiatives form an increasingly coherent approach to school improvement across all schools.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

57. The previous inspection found that the services to support school improvement were satisfactory but overall planning was judged to be complicated and not providing a unified approach to school improvement. There has been good progress since the last inspection and the services are now good.

58. The major responsibility for supporting schools in their efforts to improve rests with the LEA's advice and inspection service. Leadership of the service is good, matched by strong and effective management of the national and local strategies for school improvement. The service is led with a clear vision and provides coherent and integrated support for schools. Service objectives closely reflect the aims and values of the LEA's strategy for school improvement and the strategic objectives of the council. Central to the successful development of this service has been the role of the advice and inspection reference group, comprising headteachers and LEA officers. The establishment of the statistics and information service unit has also been crucial in providing high quality management information to support school improvement. Service planning is highly satisfactory. Service and unit plans are coherent and link effectively to the EDP. The rationale for the deployment of resources to schools is clear and consistent with the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations.

59. An important contributory factor to the success of the service is the calibre of its personnel. Staff have high levels of relevant specialist expertise and substantial professional experience. Almost all link advisers and all education officers have recent experience of headship. They are able to provide good quality advice and training and make well-informed judgements. Headteachers and governors value their work. The team draws in other expertise when necessary but the team is less effective in identifying and sharing good practice.

60. Links with other services within the education directorate to support school improvement are generally good. Education officers play an important role in ensuring that relevant school management data and information from across these services are shared to ensure effective targeting of resources and intervention where necessary.

61. Arrangements for performance management are satisfactory. Appraisal takes place on an annual basis and individual performance targets set. Monitoring of work records and discussion with staff are used to adjust work load and avoid over-burdening individual staff. The commitment of staff to induction and self-improvement is strong. The mentoring of new team members and the level of peer support engendered between colleagues contribute effectively to their professional development and enable staff to keep abreast of local and national developments.

62. Annual service targets have been met or exceeded. The service costs are higher than similar services in other LEAs but overall the service provides satisfactory value for money.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

63. In the previous inspection, the LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge and intervention was unsatisfactory. At that time, the LEA's approach had not been developed in sufficient detail and the criteria for intervention required clarification. Since then, there has been good progress and the LEA's approach is now good.

64. There is a clear definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention that draws a distinction between the school's role to self evaluate and bring about improvement, and the LEA's responsibilities to monitor, challenge and intervene, and to disseminate good practice. The LEA's approach stems from wide consultation with schools and the collaborative development of protocols for the joint evaluation of school effectiveness. Procedures for monitoring and the triggers for the different levels of intervention and support are made clear to schools through the LEA's strategy for schools requiring additional support. The LEA's capacity to challenge schools has been greatly enhanced by the significant improvements in the quality of school and pupil-level performance data now available to link advisers.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

65. The previous inspection judged the targeting of support satisfactory but with weaknesses in the arrangements for providing additional support to schools in difficulties. The LEA has now established a clear and effective strategy for the targeting of support which fully reflects the Code of Practice on LEA-school Relations. The targeting of support has improved and is now highly satisfactory.

66. The LEA's approach is based on the joint evaluation with schools of their level of performance using agreed criteria of school effectiveness, and additional support is then allocated according to their identified needs. This strategy puts a school into one of four categories, other than those schools requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses. All schools receive a half-day visit each term from the school link adviser with a negotiated programme, differentiated according to the needs of each school. For those schools in the category of causing concern to the LEA, a case conference is arranged, the governing body receives clear written information on the reasons for concern, an action plan is agreed with the school and additional support needs are identified.

67. The level of differentiated support is appropriate and there is a clear distinction between support that is available as an entitlement and that which schools can purchase through the additional link adviser support programme or from external providers identified by the LEA.

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

68. The LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools was satisfactory at the last inspection although the LEA had been slow to act upon concerns identified in some schools, particularly those schools considered to be coasting. Since then, further improvements have been made and provision is now highly satisfactory. Monitoring is the responsibility of the school link adviser and is closely linked into the school's annual self-evaluation process. Better use of relevant school performance data and an expectation that schools make improvement within a more appropriate timescale are features of the more robust approach adopted by the LEA.

69. The LEA aims to identify schools' weaknesses at an early stage so that effective intervention can take place. In most cases, this approach has been successful although the recent slippage of a secondary school with serious weaknesses into one requiring special measures indicates that there is some variability in the quality and consistency of the monitoring process.

70. The use of performance data has improved and now includes pupil-level data and the timely production of school profiles to support the school's annual self evaluation and target setting processes. This good quality information, which complements national performance data, was rated highly by schools. It is presented in a helpful and accessible format, is electronically transmitted and supports the school's self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. It has been accompanied by effective training for school staff and link advisers in its interpretation and analysis. The process of target setting has improved and is now rigorous. Link advisers use this information very effectively in their target setting role with schools.

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

71. Support for under-performing schools was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's systems of identification and support for under-performing schools have been strengthened but some weaknesses remain and support remains satisfactory. Currently, there are four schools in special measures, five with serious weaknesses and three

schools under-achieving. Twelve other schools have been identified by the LEA as causing concern. On most indicators, these current figures are better than the averages for similar authorities and LEAs nationally.

72. The proportion of primary schools found by their last Ofsted inspection to require some improvement is broadly in line with the national average, but below average for those schools requiring much improvement. For secondary schools, the proportions requiring some or much improvement are significantly below the national averages. However, the percentage of schools judged by Ofsted to have moved from serious weaknesses to special measures is above average. The number of under-performing schools is still regarded by the LEA as too high and it is acknowledged that, in a few schools, management issues have proved intractable and the necessary improvement has not been secured or, on occasion, the situation has deteriorated.

73. The LEA's policy and procedures for identifying and intervening in under-performing schools have been subject to wide consultation with schools. A school improvement group comprising advisers and officers meets on an annual basis to consider evidence on schools' performance from across services within the education directorate and to plan any necessary intervention programmes. Subsequent meetings on a monthly basis monitor progress of identified schools against agreed targets and evaluate the impact of LEA support. This is done through reports from LEA school reviews, link adviser/education officer visits and HMI monitoring reports, all of which are sent to the headteacher and the governing body. For schools no longer causing concern a sound exit strategy is agreed with the school to help sustain long term improvement.

74. The LEA uses its legal powers, when required. It gives full consideration from an early stage to the quality of leadership and management and the implications for the school's capacity to improve. The LEA has also made effective use of seconded or associate headteachers to improve the quality of school leadership.

Support for literacy and numeracy

75. The LEA has made good progress in refining the quality of its support for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy. At the time of the previous inspection, support for both functions was judged to be satisfactory. Support for literacy and numeracy is now very good, with particular strengths in the quality of intervention and the highly effective way in which national strategies are being implemented in a local context. Both the literacy and numeracy teams have been proactive in developing good practice, much of which has been recognised at a national level.

76. The LEA achieves standards at Key Stage 2 that are above the national average in both English and mathematics and compare favourably with statistical neighbours. In common with the national picture, the LEA did not meet its targets for English in 2002; nor did the LEA achieve its target for mathematics. The LEA has opted for targets in 2004 that are at the higher end of the scale as well as setting enhanced targets at level 5 as part of the local public service agreement. With the introduction of pupil-matched data, indications are that schools' targets for 2004 are close to the LEA targets in both literacy and numeracy. Both teams have been prompt in identifying precisely where and why there have been dips in

performance or rates of improvement have slowed. As a result of tightly targeted intervention and meticulous analysis of comparative data, as well as a comprehensive and, at times, innovative support programme for all schools, the LEA is able to demonstrate that it is within reach of its very challenging targets for 2004 at levels 4 and 5 in both subjects. The progress of the cohort of eleven year-old pupils who took the national tests in 2002 compares favourably with national rates and demonstrates that pupils of all abilities made better than expected progress at Key Stage 2

77. There has been excellent collaboration and a high degree of consistency in the approach taken by both teams, which has been beneficial to schools. The quality of leadership and management is good. Consultants are expert practitioners who enjoy high credibility in schools because of their ability to provide practical advice and support. Training programmes are comprehensive and increasingly well matched to curricular and school needs. Courses are very well attended and highly rated by schools. Work with 10+ high schools and partner primary schools to tackle under performance has closed the gap at Key Stage 2, although there is still some way to go. Effective guidance and support has been provided to small schools in managing mixed age classes and in providing continuity between the foundation stage and Key Stage 1. Communication with schools is very good. Both web sites provide a wide range of information, access to resources and valuable guidance on assessing pupils' learning. Monitoring and evaluation of support are of a high order and involve schools at all stages. The innovative use of pupil interviews to review the quality of teaching and learning has been instrumental in enabling the LEA and individual schools to pinpoint weaknesses.

78. Strong links with other teams promote continuity between phases of education and enable good practice to be shared. The close working partnership between consultants and link advisers has increased the rigour of target setting in the last two years and heightened the impact in schools receiving intensive support. Schools identify themselves for intensive support against a set of published criteria. This has proved to be an accurate and effective way of securing commitment and developing autonomy. Every cohort receiving intensive support has improved at a faster rate than the LEA average and in most cases this improvement has been sustained.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

79. Support for ICT in the curriculum has remained satisfactory since the previous inspection, although it is only in the last eighteen months that the LEA has begun to address the weaknesses in the curriculum and standards in a systematic way. Standards are improving steadily at every key stage and the capacity for further improvement is highly satisfactory.

80. The LEA started from a low base in terms of infrastructure and without curriculum expertise. The strategy of tackling infrastructure, training and curriculum in a progressive sequence over time failed to support effective planning and decision-making in many schools and did not enable them to see beyond technical issues to the potential for learning. Schools were initially slow to invest in hardware and software. However, government targets for computer ratios will be met, accreditation at Key Stage 4 is above the national average and the initial implementation of Broadband is on track.

81. The LEA responded constructively to schools' identification of need and has acted to address their serious concerns. This led, two years ago, to the appointment of an adviser for ICT who has built a team of consultants to work across all stages of education, a Key Stage 3 consultant post, jointly funded by schools and the LEA, and the recent appointment of a senior education officer to oversee the department's ICT strategy. There is now a clear sense of direction and purpose within the education department and structures are in place to implement a coherent strategy that promotes continuity in teaching and learning, as well as bringing together systems for management and administration. Not all initiatives have yet had time to yield results and plans for the implementation of the strategy have not been communicated sufficiently well to schools. Much remains to be done to match the quality of the LEA's partnership with schools that has developed in other areas of the curriculum if standards are to rise.

82. Support was targeted initially in primary schools. In two years, the small team of consultants has established credibility through its well-targeted intervention programme in a third of primary schools. The proportion of schools where standards were judged to be above expectations has risen by ten per cent and the proportion where standards were low has decreased at a similar rate. Three-quarters of the schools which received intensive support improved their standards at the second inspection. The early appointment of an ICT consultant in advance of the implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy has given the LEA a good platform on which to build.

83. Work on assessment and moderation of ICT standards is at an early stage, but is well conceived and has the potential to provide the LEA and schools with reliable baseline data at Key Stage 2 and 3. Training courses are better matched to need and the LEA has made a start in publishing guidance and case study material. The work of specialist schools with technology status has not been disseminated widely enough and link advisers are not sufficiently active in identifying good practice.

Recommendations

In order to support schools in their long-term planning to raise standards in ICT and in promoting its use across the curriculum:

- publish and clearly explain to schools plans for the implementation of the LEA's strategy for curriculum ICT;
- evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies; and
- develop ways of systematically spreading good practice.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

84. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 was not included in the last inspection. The current provision is good. The national strategy has been adopted and is being implemented very effectively as part of a comprehensive strategy for raising standards at Key Stage 3 which fully recognises the existing local context of high attainment. The Key Stage 3 targets set for 2004 are suitably challenging.

85. A strength of the strategy is the emphasis on partnership working with headteachers; very effective consultation has taken place regarding policy and implementation. This has resulted in all schools with Key Stage 3 pupils receiving support in either English or mathematics, in science, ICT and for two identified departments in Foundation Subjects. This initial approach provides a good working knowledge of all schools which, together with regular reviews of schools' progress, enables the Key Stage 3 team to target additional support effectively.

86. The strategy is very well managed and co-ordinated by the strategy manager together with the five line managers for the strands. Schools have been kept well informed about the strategy and are very positive about the quality and effect of the support they receive. The Key Stage 3 strategy is rightly seen as a strategy for whole school improvement and there is effective liaison with school link advisers. The LEA's strategy builds effectively on its earlier successful work in developing literacy at Key Stage 3 in 1998, and similar early developments in numeracy support, particularly in the 10+ high schools. There is good continuity between the Key Stage 3 strategy and the strategies for raising standards at Key Stage 2, with a specific project targeting those pupils transferring at 10+ and focused work with groups of schools. Continuity is further improved by the literacy and numeracy strategy managers also managing these same strands within the Key Stage 3 strategy. Links have been forged with the LEA's Key Stage 4 strategy and further work is planned for close collaboration between both teams within the context of a secondary improvement strategy.

87. Standards at Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science are above the national average and in the case of science, well above. They are also above the standards achieved by similar authorities. The progress of the cohort of fourteen year-old pupils who took the national tests in 2002 compares favourably with national rates and demonstrates that pupils are keeping pace with the national trend in English, mathematics and science.

88. Schools value highly the work of consultants. Their work in individual schools is clearly focused and supported by effective collaborative working with link advisers. Centrally organised training, and that which takes place alongside teachers in classroom, has been well received by schools. The audit by Key Stage 3 consultants effectively complements the existing range of performance data and analysis already available to schools and enables the development of improvement strategies which reflect the needs of individual groups of pupils. The team has conducted appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the strategy, including pupil evaluations of teaching and learning.

Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers

89. Support for minority ethnic groups and Traveller children was not evaluated in the previous inspection. The quality of support is consistently good for both groups across all phases of education. Both the ethnic minority achievement support service (EMASS) and the traveller education service have a deservedly high reputation in schools. Strategies have a strong focus on tackling underachievement and on raising standards. Plans are clearly articulated and based on a detailed and up to date knowledge of the changing local population, although objectives and targets for Traveller children are omitted from the EDP. Changes to the deployment of the ethnic minority achievement grant are being achieved through effective consultation with the aim of targeting resources even more closely to need

in the context of a standstill budget. The deployment of the traveller education grant is now based on a comprehensive audit that enables the team to provide support in targeted schools for shorter periods, with schools now taking the main responsibility for meeting the needs of Traveller children.

90. Since the last inspection, a restructuring of EMASS has attracted members from minority ethnic communities into the service and provided greater flexibility in the deployment of staff. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are directly related to performance management targets and to annual school agreements. These have proved effective in providing detailed information on impact and in developing good practice. The service has a long history of analysing data in order to measure progress of individual pupils who speak English as an additional language. More recent monitoring of the standards and progress of minority ethnic groups has enabled the LEA to set targets for each cohort of thirty pupils or more. Evidence indicates that whether the minority ethnic group achieves above the LEA average or well below, rates of improvement are at least satisfactory and often better. Ofsted inspection reports and LEA monitoring also confirm that individual pupils make good and sometimes very good progress.

91. A strong element of EMASS support, through the Loughborough 'English for new arrivals' project, is the induction of asylum seekers, refugees and other minority ethnic groups who arrive in the county speaking little or no English. Good assessment procedures, intensive language support for eight weeks and supported transition to school enable pupils to get off to a good start. The traveller education service is also successful in promoting access to education, in enabling pupils to achieve satisfactory rates of attendance and, in the case of some children from families of showpeople, to achieve the higher levels in national tests. Service priorities are rightly focused on highly mobile families and those on unauthorised sites. The service was judged to be of a high quality and providing very good value for money when inspected by HMI in 1999. Its procedures for achieving Best Value have improved since then through its use of benchmarking data as part of a regional consortium.

92. Neither service operates in isolation. Good progress has been made in aligning training programmes with national strategies and local priorities. Collaborative planning and joint training with other teams has led to the development of anti-bias guidance, curriculum guidance for multi-cultural education and improvements in the quality of partnership teaching in schools.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

93. Provision for more able pupils was a local priority for the LEA at the time of the last inspection, although it was reported that this had not been communicated successfully to schools. Support for gifted and talented pupils is now good. The LEA has implemented a clear strategy across all phases. Schools are developing structures and initiatives to raise aspirations and standards, individually and collaboratively. Plans for gifted and talented pupils thread through EDP priorities for every key stage. Close working between the link adviser with strategic responsibility and colleagues responsible for the literacy, numeracy, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 strategies promotes a coherent approach that is beginning to have an effect in schools.

94. The proportion of pupils attaining higher levels in national tests at all key stages is similar to the national picture, except in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3, where the proportion is higher. In order to raise standards, elected members have set the goal of being in the top quartile of LEAs at the higher levels. Rigorous analysis of data has led to increasingly challenging targets at LEA and school level. Enhanced targets have been agreed as part of the council's local public service agreement; at Key Stage 2 for literacy and numeracy and at Key Stage 4, for pupils gaining three A*- A grades at GCSE.

95. Systematic auditing of provision and practice, as well as the use of comprehensive data, has enabled the department to identify accurately where to target its resources. Clear guidance has been developed in partnership with schools on policy, practice and identification. Schools are supported in finding solutions that meet their specific needs. High schools and upper schools have worked together to establish common systems for identification in order to provide continuity and to track pupils across key stages. Work with 10+ high schools and their feeder primary schools is tackling under performance in Year 6.

96. Individual schools have successfully piloted initiatives, such as mentoring, and two clusters have established an Excellence in Cities model with a co-ordinator. Innovative pilot work in a group of primary schools has recently received national recognition and will serve as a model for a countywide programme. The LEA is beginning to disseminate good practice, but recognises that this aspect of its work is at an early stage. Training programmes have been developed to respond to schools' needs and, from April 2003, the LEA has negotiated access to national training for its co-ordinators as well as making a central purchase to support those schools which are using world class tests.

97. The LEA has actively sought ways to provide opportunities for the very able and to raise the aspirations of more able pupils who underachieve. Study support is provided for more able pupils from disadvantaged communities. Productive links have been established with independent schools and universities. Summer school provision is of a high order, benefiting from the contribution of external organisations, specialist schools and the county's provision for outdoor education and arts in education.

Support for school management

98. This aspect was not the subject of fieldwork during this inspection. Support for school leadership and management was satisfactory at the last inspection. Responses in the survey for this inspection indicate that schools rate the LEA's support to develop leadership and management skills in schools, including support for school self evaluation, as better than satisfactory. Scrutiny of the documentary evidence provided by the LEA, together with its self evaluation, affirms this to be the case. The current provision is highly satisfactory.

Support to governors

99. LEA support for governors was highly satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and remains so. After a period during 2001/02 without a manager, the appointment of a replacement is now bringing fresh impetus to the service. The statutory framework is fulfilled and proper advantage is taken of the advice and guidance from the DfES. The school survey indicates that schools rate the LEA's support for governors as satisfactory.

100. Vacancies for local authority nominees on governing bodies remain high, at a level above the national average. Following a recommendation in the previous inspection report, a new protocol has been negotiated between the political parties giving them three months to find a replacement, at the end of which time other names may be sought including from the school itself. Despite these changes, problems persist around the time taken to fill LEA governor vacancies and similarly for co-opted governors. The target for posts filled at any one time has not been met. Plans are in hand to develop a recruitment strategy for governors beginning with a conference later in the year for governors.

101. Another current priority for the service is to develop the strategic role of governors. Pilot work with four governing bodies on an audit of governance has focused on key aspects of their role, including strategic management. The outcome of this work has been a self-review tool for governing bodies leading to an action plan to address areas of weakness. The intention is to make this scheme more widely available to governing bodies. Governor training is a strength of the service. Training courses have been well received and are tailored according to the needs of individual or groups of schools, identified through termly meetings of the link governors. Training is provided in collaboration with the Leicestershire association of governors and through the joint scheme to develop a team of associate trainers from the ranks of existing school governors.

102. Relationships with the LEA are generally good and governors feel valued. Communication is effective through a regular newsletter, a handbook and other formal and informal channels, including termly meetings with the director of education. Regular briefings for the chairs and clerks to governing bodies are well attended. Governors interviewed valued the prompt, responsive service which they receive from the governor support team. The LEA's support for governing bodies whose schools are causing concern is good.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

103. This area was judged as satisfactory in the previous inspection, since then, performance has improved and is now highly satisfactory.

104. The LEA is rightly more concerned about securing services than it is about being the sole provider, and consequently a healthy mixed market of providers has developed. Access to services provided by the LEA is well set out on the LEA web site, and a review of access to all council services is currently being undertaken as a major council initiative. Service level agreements are clear, and incorporate service standards; prices are clearly set out and schools have a varied menu to best meet their individual needs in most areas. Schools are provided with information about accredited providers, although this is mainly in those areas where the LEA is not a provider. Schools are also provided with good advice on what to look for in an external contract or supplier. Audit checklists sent to all schools also provide helpful self evaluative materials to ensure they are getting the best out of their support services, and there is a range of client support packages, which increasing numbers of schools are buying into. Overall, moves to increase schools' capacity to make purchasing decisions are highly satisfactory. Schools report being generally satisfied in this respect, although the uneven quality of support staff was an issue in both the survey and focus groups, and reflects the improving but, as yet, insecure performance management system across the department.

105. The LEA has a good range of mechanisms for gathering performance data and user views, and its methods for collating these and feeding results into improvement planning are sound and developing. Although work is at an early stage, the LEA is developing some useful measures of impact, for example, seeking a link between property improvements and raising standards.

Financial services

106. This service was not inspected in the last inspection. Financial services to schools and the education department are satisfactory.

107. Schools are provided with a clear description of what core services are provided by the LEA and what is traded. Schools are able to purchase a range of packages to suit their needs. The volume of traded service is increasing steadily, mainly from the primary sector, to an extent where the visiting bursar service has recruited more staff to cope with demand. Comprehensive guidance documents on a range of financial issues are provided. Schools have access to a good benchmarking system which enables them to choose their comparator grouping and there is an innovative and robust system for following up the risk-based audit visits. Deficit budgets are followed up rigorously, and schools offered appropriate support to help themselves; the requirement for schools to report surpluses in excess of five per cent of income is similarly followed up. Costs are reasonable, and benchmarking against regional LEAs shows Leicestershire's costs are well below the mean. Schools are generally satisfied with all aspects of the service, including payroll.

108. However, there are aspects of the service where good intentions for improvements have not been realised. Electronic interaction between schools and the LEA on financial matters is the exception, and the use of financial data on the LEA's school database for predicting schools with problems is underdeveloped. A range of tactics is employed or planned, to increase schools' capacity for financial management, but these are not brought together into a coherent strategy. Relatively simple medium term financial planning materials, along with over complex budget explanations are provided for schools, but the LEA does not monitor their effect, which makes the value for money of the resources used to produce them questionable.

Recommendations

In order to increase schools' financial management capacity:

- develop and implement a strategy for the service with relevant actions, timescales and resources identified.

In order to improve the predictive capacity of the LEA's database on school performance:

- include a set of financial data agreed with schools.

Personnel services

109. The performance of personnel services is highly satisfactory; it was not inspected in the previous inspection.

110. A recent Best Value inspection resulted in the decision not to merge the education department's personnel team with that in the corporate centre. This has enabled the service to remain dedicated to education and hence to target its expertise and experience. Schools are generally complimentary, but where this is not the case, regular surveys enable the service to track and remedy problems. Relationships with the trades unions are very good, with many examples of tough decisions being taken with professionalism and sensitivity, particularly regarding competency, redundancy and industrial tribunals.

111. Traded functions are supported by good documents to schools, setting service levels out clearly and enabling schools to choose a variety of options to suit their circumstances. Core functions are carried out well, with all required policy documents provided to schools, and good support to schools experiencing difficulties. However, activities to enable the service to provide schools and the department with more sophisticated management data such as trends in staff absence and turnover are underdeveloped.

Property services

112. The property service available to schools in Leicestershire is good; it was not previously inspected.

113. Leicestershire has a good record of corporate interest and investment in its property, especially since 1980, when a property maintenance fund was established, ahead of many councils. Since 1993, when school property maintenance became a traded service, it has continued to thrive to the point where schools rate the service in the top 25 per cent nationally. This is unsurprising given the indicators of performance. Service costs are regularly and favourably benchmarked against neighbours, completion of works are over 90 per cent on time and within budget, contractors are involved in an appraisal scheme, and the materials sent to schools are very helpful.

ICT for administration

114. This provision was judged satisfactory in the previous inspection, and is now highly satisfactory.

115. Currently, all schools elect to subscribe to a fully traded service which rightly focuses on improving schools' management of information. All schools have a common suite of commercially procured programmes, and support and training for these are included in the contract. Training courses get consistently high ratings, and schools report satisfaction with the service. Technical support documentation is helpful, and the access to support for software and other advice is good, although some schools are unsure about the distinction between this and hardware advice, which is not part of the service. In an attempt to reduce such confusion, improve connectivity and help-desk support, the LEA is establishing a virtual private network as part of the East Midlands Broadband Consortium.

116. The common pupil dataset is established and the majority of schools were successful in submitting statutory pupil data on line this year. Links with the school improvement team are sound and improving, fulfilling the relevant aims within the overall ICT strategic plan. Advisers are able to generate a range of performance data prior to visiting schools. Schools' own use of data is improving by, for example, the use of assessment software, and the strategy for increasing headteachers' capacity to utilise data is sound, although it is hampered by the small amount of financial and personnel data currently available on line.

Client arrangements for caretaking and cleaning, grounds maintenance and catering

117. No judgement was made on this aspect in the previous inspection. The client arrangements are highly satisfactory.

118. Client support for schools can be accessed on a trading basis through the client and technical service operation. Schools are able to purchase a range of services to suit their need and increasing numbers are doing so, both from within and outside the county. This, combined with the good levels of satisfaction reported to the LEA and in the school survey point to a service which is improving its customer focus. Contract monitoring reports are helpful and suitably risk-based. Schools are advised on a range of in-house and privately provided contracts, and all schools are given sound documentary advice on securing services.

119. Of particular note is the good work on sites' development. The service employs 24 workers on a sheltered scheme, competes in the open market for much of its income, and is rightly proud of those on the scheme who graduate to non-sheltered employment.

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

120. This area was not previously inspected. The LEA's support for assuring the supply and quality of teachers is satisfactory. The recruitment and retention of teachers is a local priority within the EDP following concerns raised by headteachers at the annual EDP conference in November 2000. In particular, shortages were identified in some secondary subjects, reception class teachers and supply teachers. Progress since that time has been slow but the appointment six months ago of a recruitment strategy manager is bringing a sharper focus to this work.

121. In the survey conducted for this inspection, schools rated the LEA's support for recruitment and retention as less than satisfactory and in the bottom quartile for LEAs. To a large extent this reflects their frustration at the slow progress, in particular, in addressing their need for suitably qualified supply teachers. However, a number of major initiatives have been put in place recently and there is good capacity now for further improvement. The LEA is currently involved in the procurement process for a commercial supply agency in order to establish a local pool of supply teachers.

122. A group of headteachers and officers was formed in 2001 to analyse the problem of recruitment and retention and to develop a strategic approach which eventually became the broad three-year programme set out in the current EDP. Political support for this approach was also provided through the establishment of a five-member review panel of the education

scrutiny committee whose recommendations also contributed to the LEA's strategy and to the work programme for the recruitment strategy manager.

123. The LEA fully recognises the need to compile a comprehensive statistical base on which to plan its strategy. As yet, however, the LEA is not in a position to predict longer term needs. The education personnel service has recently established a management information system in all schools and colleges which has the capacity to generate a wide range of personnel data about the teaching workforce and which will supplement other monitoring data derived from school surveys. The LEA has recently agreed a one-year pilot contract with a private provider for their web-based teacher recruitment service which will enable the LEA to monitor vacancies.

124. Support for schools has focused on the development of return to teaching courses; three cohorts have successfully completed courses, many of whom have secured teaching posts in the authority. The LEA is also working with higher education consortia to establish regional bodies for the recruitment of graduates to the graduate training programme.

125. The LEA's support for newly qualified teachers is highly satisfactory. This support includes a well organised induction programme and effective quality assurance arrangements. The LEA provides a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development and management development, principally through the advice and inspection service but also involving other sections of the department, most notably governor, finance and personnel support. There is good co-ordination and support for the development of advanced skills teachers with numbers rising from an initially low base of seven in secondary schools in September 2001, to the current figure of 36 across all phases. New and acting headteachers receive good support through the LEA's induction and mentoring arrangements. Although the LEA makes effective use of consultants, as yet there are no effective quality assurance arrangements in place. The LEA is also working with higher education to develop accreditation of the continuous professional development programme, including opportunities for newly qualified teachers.

Section 3: Special educational needs

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

126. The LEA carries out its statutory duties with regard to special educational needs in a conscientious and well-planned manner. It provides satisfactory support to schools to enable them to improve their own capacity to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. However, the LEA has made insufficient and slow progress in clarifying, and then implementing its overall strategy for special educational needs and there are weaknesses in the value for money provided by its work.

127. A key weakness is the lack of co-ordination between this strategy, especially as it applies to provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), and the LEA's support for behaviour, which is intended to avoid the exclusion of pupils from school. A vicious circle has emerged. Local government reorganisation in 1997 left the county without a special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The commitment of the LEA and schools to the education of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream, and in their local communities wherever possible, contributed to a decision not to establish an EBD special school. The LEA's audit shows that support for emotional, social and behavioural difficulties is the third largest category of need in mainstream schools. However, the requirement to provide full time education for excluded pupils reduced the amount of support it could provide to schools in preventing exclusions. Subsequently, despite the LEA funding some very expensive packages of support to enable pupils to remain in mainstream schools and the number of expensive out-of-county and independent school places paid for by the LEA has increased. Headteachers perceive a lack of willingness on the part of officers and members to re-open the debate on how best to meet the needs of these pupils.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of provision for special educational needs:

- revise and implement, as a matter of urgency, the strategy for providing for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties to ensure that it is coherent with the support that schools receive to prevent exclusions.

The LEA's strategy for SEN

128. The last inspection found that the LEA's strategy for special educational needs was unsatisfactory. This remains the case. The LEA has clearly stated the principles upon which its strategy is built and identified correctly the respective responsibilities of the education department and of schools. However, implementation in general has been too slow and several important criteria for success have not been met. Action plans do not show clearly enough the steps to be taken or the intended time-scale. Nor do they reflect accurately or in sufficient detail the resources that are required. Schools support the LEA's emphasis on inclusion but they do not feel that they have been involved sufficiently in either the development or the review of policy. The LEA has missed a number of opportunities to initiate a countywide debate on the strategy for special educational needs. Given that the

LEA's self evaluation of performance in this area did not identify these key weaknesses and taking into account both recent and current performance, the capacity for improvement is unsatisfactory.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for special educational needs:

- re-engage stakeholders, including parents, pupils and particularly schools in discussions about the practical implications of the principles upon which the strategy is built and on progress to date; and
- produce and implement as soon as possible plans which identify clearly a timetable for intended actions, the allocation of responsibilities and resources to support these actions.

129. The LEA's current development plan identifies ten priorities that are in line with national policy. The LEA attempts to keep head teachers up to date with progress but it has not succeeded. Headteachers do not have a comprehensive understanding of the strategy as a whole or of the implications of some key elements. In the last inspection, the role of special schools within the range of provision was unclear and this remains the case. The role and purpose of area based special schools has not been defined with sufficient clarity. Headteachers are aware of developments in specific areas but have limited knowledge or understanding of the implications for the county as a whole.

130. In line with its commitment to the inclusion of children with special educational needs, the LEA has stated its intention to reduce the number of out-of-county and independent special school placements but has not succeeded in doing so. Although the percentage of pupils with statements who attended special schools within the LEA in 2001 was well below the national figure, for those attending special schools outside the LEA it was above. There are currently 340 pupils in out-of-county or independent special schools and 65 of these placements were made during 2002.

131. In 1999, the LEA identified the need to improve the funding arrangements for SEN provision in mainstream by delegating the budget for statemented pupils. Progress has been slow. The LEA has failed to communicate the educational benefits of its proposals or to convince schools that this is more than a matter of financial expediency. The proposal put forward in 2001 over-emphasised the need for the LEA to meet its overall target for delegation and schools rejected it. A further proposal is currently being consulted upon through a series of area meetings. It aims to enable schools to make early provision for identified need without resort to the statementing process. The proposed funding model changes the focus from the individual child to the pupil profile within the schools by using prior attainment and a school deprivation index as indicators of need. Many schools perceive that the current consultation is rushed. Too many questions remain unanswered for them to be able to make an informed judgement.

Statutory obligations

132. The last inspection found that the LEA took reasonable steps to meet its statutory

obligations and the position is now highly satisfactory..

133. The percentage of children for whom the LEA maintains a statement of special educational need has risen slightly since 1998 and is now in line with national levels. In 2001, the percentage of statements issued for the first time, and prepared within the recommended 18 weeks, was in line with the national figure at 65.7 per cent. Between April and December 2002, the LEA reports that this increased to 86 per cent other than where exceptions applied.

134. The quality of statements and the LEA's arrangements for making, reviewing and amending statements are satisfactory. New and recently amended statements are sufficiently specific in defining the provision to be made. Resources to support statemented pupils are devolved in the form of teacher or ancillary hours and are clearly differentiated by need. The LEA acts promptly on recommendations from annual reviews.

135. The LEA provides a wide range of good information and guidance for parents of pupils with special educational need. In particular, those parents involved in the assessment, statement and annual review process receive helpful, independent advice and support from the parent partnership scheme. Funding is available through this scheme to provide interpreters or signers for the deaf to assist parents at meetings. There is a strong commitment to maintaining contact with parents even when they have signalled their intention to appeal to a tribunal. As a result, the number of such appeals is low and only five cases went to a tribunal hearing in 2001/2.

School improvement

136. The LEA's support to schools to enable them to improve their own capacity to manage SEN was not reported on in the last inspection. It is currently satisfactory. The LEA's advice on self evaluation is good and its monitoring and evaluation of the quality of support for SEN in schools is sound. Weaknesses exist in the LEA's overall allocation of resources and in the consistency of the amount and quality of support available from the education psychology service.

137. The criteria used for making statutory assessments are sound. They are consistent with national policy and in line with the revised Code of Practice. Schools have been provided with satisfactory advice and training on the implementation of the Code. Statements include clear descriptions of the provision to be made as well as the additional support allocated.

138. The LEA has identified clearly for schools the principles underpinning effective monitoring and evaluation and made relevant and practical suggestions about systems and procedures. It usefully analyses reports of school inspections, highlighting common strengths and weaknesses. The LEA's annual monitoring of statements for pupils with SEN indicates that all such pupils have individual education plans and provides schools with useful guidance, for example on how to improve the quality of those plans. The LEA has provided sound advice and guidance to special schools on setting targets for individual pupils.

139. The current proposal to delegate funding and revise the formula is intended to align resources more closely to need and avoid, wherever possible, the use of scarce resources in administering the statutory process. The amount delegated to special units attached to

mainstream schools is the same regardless of phase or need, except in the case of those units which cater for pupils on the autistic spectrum. The funding formula for mainstream schools currently includes an element based on free school meals, as an indication of additional educational need, and beyond this resources are allocated through statements.

140. The LEA has advised mainstream schools to spend approximately five per cent of their budget in meeting SEN. The funding formula also includes an amount to facilitate the work of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). However, the LEA does not have systems in place to monitor either the amount spent by schools in making provision for SEN or its effectiveness.

141. SEN support services are managed and allocated centrally. There are clear criteria for the allocation of support but resources are limited. Furthermore, staff vacancies and absences, particularly within the educational psychology service, often detract from the consistent implementation of these criteria. Schools rate the effectiveness of learning support services as satisfactory but that of the educational psychology service as less than satisfactory. They place it within the bottom 25 per cent nationally. Schools understand that the service has experienced significant difficulties with recruitment and retention. However, there is inconsistency in both the amount and quality of advice and support received by schools. Headteachers perceive unwillingness on the part of the LEA to respond to their concerns.

Recommendations

In order to improve consistency in the amount and quality of advice and support provided by the educational psychology service:

- discuss and identify with schools their concerns;
- identify alternative means of providing the support required by schools; and
- establish and implement a training, recruitment and retention strategy for educational psychologists.

Value for money

142. This function was not reported on in the last inspection. It is currently unsatisfactory. The quality of services provided to raise attainment for children with special educational needs is satisfactory but such support is limited and often inconsistent. The LEA does not have sound procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of either schools' expenditure on SEN or that which is allocated through statements in the form of teachers' or ancillaries' hours. Consequently, the LEA cannot demonstrate that the SEN budget provides value for money. This budget, as a percentage of its total education budget, is approximately five per cent lower than the national average or that of comparable LEAs. However, the budget for statemented pupil support, which proportionately is one of the highest nationally, has been overspent for the last three years by at least half a million pounds, reducing the potential to redirect resources to earlier intervention.

*Recommendation***In order to improve the value for money of provision for special educational needs:**

- establish and implement procedures for monitoring the use, and evaluating the effectiveness, of schools' expenditure on SEN whether from their own budgets or from resources allocated through statements of special educational need.

143. Criteria for funding the support for different types and level of need are clear and consistently applied. Schools understand these criteria and the way that resources are allocated to mainstream schools. The LEA recognises that any agreed delegation of funding will need to be accompanied by detailed guidance from the LEA on its use. The action plan supporting this development underestimates the resources required in providing such guidance.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

144. The establishment of a new political administration in Leicestershire is beginning to contribute to a more coherent approach to social inclusion. The council's medium term corporate strategy recognises the importance of education and makes specific commitments to looked after children, those with special educational needs and other vulnerable groups.

145. Leicestershire has not until recently attracted any government funded initiatives to promote social inclusion. The council is keen to become involved in such initiatives whenever the opportunity arises. The recently submitted local public service agreement gives further emphasis to the council's commitment to social inclusion by including enhanced targets for the attainment of looked after children. This is one example of the effective working relationship between the education and social services departments. The council is acting as the lead body for the Children's Fund and this has enabled the plan to be co-ordinated with other key council plans. The council is also trying to maximise the effect of various funding streams in a proposal for an early excellence centre.

146. The previous inspection did not report in detail on how the LEA fulfilled its statutory duties with regard to the education of pupils who have no school place, attendance, health and safety, welfare and child protection, and looked after children. Nor did it comment on the effectiveness of measures to combat racism. The work of the LEA in all these areas is at least satisfactory and demonstrates sound working relationships with the police and health services. Support for raising the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and Travellers is good. However, support for behaviour remains unsatisfactory.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

147. The LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion was not reported on during the last inspection. It is currently unsatisfactory but improving.

148. Despite the effectiveness of the majority of services and initiatives, the LEA lacks a coherent strategy for social inclusion to direct, guide and co-ordinate the work of officers and schools. Within a context of limited resources, individual services in the education department have attempted, often successfully, to address issues and promote initiatives. However, there has been no strategic recognition of the connections between these or of the relationship between social inclusion and the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, particularly those with emotional and behavioural needs. In one instance, this has resulted in the success of one service at the expense of another. The requirement to provide full time education for pupils excluded from school has been met by redirecting resources away from the provision of support for the prevention of exclusions. Levels of permanent and fixed term exclusions are rising. Provision for a significant number of pupils with statements continues to be made in out-of-county and independent special schools.

149. The LEA has been slow to provide leadership in this area and has only recently produced a draft inclusion policy. Schools agree with the principles this contains but do not

feel sufficiently involved in its development or aware of its implications. At the time of the inspection, the policy was not supported by a plan of action or identified resources.

Recommendation

In order to improve the strategy to promote social inclusion:

- move swiftly to produce, and then implement, plans which detail the priorities and timetable for action, together with the responsibilities and resources identified.

150. There are a number of active partnerships that effectively support social inclusion. Many of these are linked through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, which has been increasingly active in the last year. The capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

151. The LEA monitors the achievement of vulnerable groups of pupils and has recognised in the EDP the need to develop a co-ordinated approach to the setting of targets for improvement. For minority ethnic pupils, there is evidence of improving standards. Targets for lower attaining pupils have been set within the EDP and the percentage of pupils attaining at least one A*-G grade at GCSE increased by one per cent between 1998 and 2002, slightly faster than was found nationally. However, despite significant improvements in the attendance of looked after children there has been little improvement in their attainment.

The supply of school places

152. This function was not reported on in the previous inspection, although a recommendation regarding a common age of admission was made. The current provision is satisfactory.

153. Leicestershire has managed the match of supply and demand for mainstream places well over many years, and schools are generally satisfied with this aspect of performance. The general figures for surplus places and overcrowding are well within acceptable limits, at seven per cent in primary and secondary schools. The infant class size commitment has been met, and some good work has been done, ahead of many LEAs, in building the continued funding for this into the mainstream budget process. Technical data are generally good, with high accuracy of pupil projections at county and area levels. At school level, accuracy is acceptable, but while projections are shared with schools as part of the budget notification, they are not routinely discussed with headteachers and governors to enable the local perspective to be incorporated.

154. Stakeholders are routinely involved and good links have been forged with the dioceses, district council planners and developers. The School Organisation Committee (SOC) is properly constituted, well serviced, and its activities well matched to need. Relations between SOC constituents are cordial and positive, remaining so even after the recent closure of a small church school. The school organisation plan is a sound document, which sets out sufficient detail to enable the reader to establish the key priorities for the council. Good links to asset management are based on common management but although links to other key strategies such as school improvement and special educational needs are

mentioned in the plan, this is not in sufficient detail to establish the precise nature of the council's intentions.

155. Slow progress has been made on some key strategic issues. The council readily adopted the recommendation from the previous inspection that it should consider universal 4+ provision as a priority. However, although a minimum entitlement of two terms in reception has been introduced, to date only an additional 500 full time equivalent 4+ places have been established and there is no earmarked funding identified to continue the proposed roll-out. A policy for small schools has now been agreed, but its development took several years. The previous report also suggested the need for greater clarity for the role of special schools in the future LEA structure. Some good work has been done in developing an area-based approach to increasing capacity and providing a closer match between need and provision. However, key stakeholders are unclear about both the strategy and the detailed implications.

Admissions

156. This area of operation was not subject to any fieldwork. The previous inspection rated admissions as being highly satisfactory. Responses from the school survey, where secondary schools rated the LEA in the top 25 per cent, support the LEA's view that performance remains highly satisfactory.

Asset management

157. This function is satisfactory. It was not inspected during the previous inspection.

158. Leicestershire has a good record of investment in its property stock, and although the results of the surveys to complete the asset management plan (AMP) revealed that £94 million was needed to bring school buildings up to standard, this was below the average of its statistical neighbours. Investment has increased from £6 million in 1999 to over £21 million this year through a variety of means. Notwithstanding this, although the AMP clearly sets out the resources needed over the next five years, the income available does not match the need, nor is a strategy outlined which will achieve this. The council has earmarked money for a feasibility study into Private Finance Initiative schemes.

159. The various data components of the AMP have been collected efficiently, with sensible use of a former deputy head as a consultant for suitability data, and the plan has been approved by the DfES. Reference groups involving school representatives have ensured a good balance between technical expertise and a school perspective. The criteria for the prioritisation of work have been well consulted upon and agreed by schools, but although maintenance priorities have been shared with schools, major projects have not, thereby reducing schools' abilities to make sound decisions about how they might use their capital resources. There are, as yet, unrealised plans to enable the property database to be accessed on line. In the meantime, the mechanism for including LEA sponsored improvements on the database is secure but there is no clear strategy for school generated work to be included, thereby impeding the efficient deployment of resources.

160. Key personnel are able to clearly explain how the AMP links into other key LEA plans, and there is some potentially very useful work being undertaken with schools to gather

data on the impact of property improvements on standards. The LEA provides a number of useful activities to improve the capacity of schools to manage their assets but as yet, they do not constitute a comprehensive strategy.

Recommendations

In order to further improve asset management:

- identify how the funding gap to meet identified need will be met;
- establish robust systems for ensuring the property database is regularly updated to include school generated works;
- tell schools where they are on the priority list of major works; and;
- establish a system to share knowledge with schools about the integrated use of LEA and school funding streams.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

161. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's provision for pupils educated otherwise than at school was unsatisfactory. Since then the LEA has met the requirement to provide full time education for pupils who have no school place from September 2002. Provision is now satisfactory although, at the time of the inspection, the authority had not registered the combination of temporary accommodation currently in use as a pupil referral unit. This was an important weakness but officers responded positively in seeking advice and guidance from the DfES and registration has now been approved. Despite the allocation of significant additional resources to the student support service, provision of full time education for excluded pupils has only been achieved by directing support away from that designed to prevent exclusions.

162. The LEA's student support service is responsible for making provision for all pupils who have been permanently excluded from school. For pupils in Key Stages 1 to 3, full time provision is made either in one of the service's teaching bases or by a combination of home tuition and attendance at one of these bases or at an outreach centre. Provision for primary-aged pupils was opened in November 2001 in response to a recommendation in the previous inspection report. The response was slow owing to problems in recruiting to the service and serious difficulties in locating suitable long-term accommodation. A remaining weakness is that, at present, provision for primary and Key Stage 3 pupils is in the same building. The LEA is urgently seeking county council approval to take over and adapt a community home, which becomes vacant in summer 2003.

163. At Key Stage 4, provision for excluded students is made through the 'Directions' pre-vocational team. Provision is focused on meeting the needs of individuals and includes placement at a college of further education, a work placement linked to training and support for literacy and numeracy skills. Students' progress and attendance are well monitored. A Connexions action plan is drawn up with each student. Increasing numbers of excluded pupils are gaining vocational and other qualifications but few gain GCSEs. However, this is within the context of higher re-integration levels than those found nationally. As a result, the

proportion of pupils receiving alternative tuition for more than a year is below the national average. Furthermore, several secondary schools allow excluded pupils to return to GCSE classes if supported by a member of the student support service.

164. The LEA has in place effective procedures to monitor the education of pupils whose parents choose to educate them at home. Provision for school phobics and children with medical needs is satisfactory. However, the current provision for teenage mothers is unsatisfactory. In 2001/2 only one out of thirteen young women continued their education. A new service has recently been established to secure access to education for young women of school age who are pregnant or who are mothers. It sensibly aims to keep each student in her school and to return her to full time education as soon as possible.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for teenage mothers:

- ensure that young mothers of school age and beyond have opportunities to return to and continue their education, through cooperation and partnerships between social services, schools and colleges of further education.

Attendance

165. The last inspection did not report on the LEA's support for attendance. It is highly satisfactory. In 2001, attendance in primary schools was above the national average and unauthorised absence was below, while in secondary schools both were in line with national averages. Figures for 2002 indicate that overall attendance has improved slightly, unauthorised absence has stabilised and authorised absence reduced.

166. The education welfare service works closely and productively with schools, families, pupils and other agencies to improve levels of attendance. Support to schools is well targeted according to number on roll, levels of unauthorised absence and the number of referrals to the service. For the past two years, the service has carried a series of attendance reviews in schools. They are designed to increase the accuracy of information on authorised and unauthorised absence and to ensure that schools understand and apply the referral system consistently. This, together with the sound procedures for monitoring and analysing attendance data, means that the service is increasingly able to target additional support to schools with higher levels of absence. Such support includes an evaluation of a school's policy on attendance and its strategies to reduce absence. A draft attendance strategy has recently been produced to emphasise that support for attendance is an issue for the whole department and to increase the emphasis placed on attendance within the context of inclusion and raising attainment. There is an effective working relationship with the advice and inspection service, and link advisers provide regular support and challenge to schools.

167. The LEA makes appropriate use of statutory orders concerning attendance. Police and education welfare officers undertake joint truancy patrols and there is a protocol in place to both guide their work and evaluate its effectiveness. Levels of prosecution for poor attendance are low. Contact with families is maintained throughout the legal process and many prosecutions are withdrawn as a result of improved attendance

Behaviour support

168. The LEA's support for behaviour was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. It remains so. The LEA has been slow to adopt a strategy for developing provision and services for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Furthermore, insufficient progress has been made in addressing the recommendation in the last report to provide better educational opportunities for primary aged pupils at risk of exclusion. Between 1999 and 2001, permanent exclusions fell and were at or below the LEA's own targets. However, in 2002, a rise of 32 per cent took the total number of permanent exclusions to 111 compared to the target of 90. Fixed term exclusions rose steadily from 1808 to 2825 during this period. The LEA's self evaluation was not sufficiently rigorous to identify where weaknesses exist. This, together with the slow pace of policy development and the scarcity of resources, means that the capacity to improve is unsatisfactory.

169. The need for a strategy to develop provision and services in this area was identified in 1998 but a report did not go to cabinet until February 2001. The strategy identifies correctly the need for both an early response when a child is at risk of exclusion and for more support in early years' settings and primary schools. However, the strategy has not guided practice. Headteachers report that the quality of support to prevent exclusions is good but it is scarce. Resources have been diverted from support for preventing exclusion to meeting the requirement for full-time provision for pupils who are already permanently excluded. The support that is available is, in the main, directed at older pupils. Furthermore, both the student support service and the educational psychology service have experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Schools perceive a lack of commitment on the part of elected members and officers to tackle the difficult issues in this area.

Recommendations**In order to improve support for behaviour:**

- provide prompt support for children at risk of exclusion; and
- establish access to support in early years settings and primary schools for pupils at risk of exclusion.

170. At secondary level, the LEA has sensibly targeted its support at those schools with the greatest need. The LEA's audit of exclusions accurately identified an increase in exclusions at Years 8 and 9 and those schools with the highest number of exclusions. The Directions pre-vocational team has extended its work to include Key Stage 4 pupils requiring a suitable alternative mainstream or special school place. Further support for pupils in Key Stage 4 is available through the Connexions service. The Standards Fund grant for inclusion has been used to set up learning support units in four high schools with links to two upper schools. In the three units that have been running for more than a term, targets to reduce exclusion have been met.

171. The behaviour support plan, covering the period from 2001 to 2004, provided schools with useful guidance and information regarding access to support. However, given the above developments this information is now out of date. Limited support for schools

remains available from three services: the student support service, the educational psychology service and the advice and inspection service. The LEA is about to circulate further guidance on behaviour issues.

172. In response to concerns about bullying that were expressed in a pupil attitude survey, elected members consulted officers and provided funds to secure improvement. This has allowed the LEA to appoint a strategy manager to co-ordinate and generate commitment to policies and practices which will reduce bullying at school level. As part of the joint mental health strategy, the LEA has worked closely with health and social services in the region to support the Child Behaviour Intervention Initiative. It is proposed to extend this work to other areas of the county through the Children's Fund.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

173. This provision was not previously inspected. The LEA's support for health and safety, welfare and child protection is highly satisfactory, as is the capacity for further improvement. In the survey of schools for this inspection, support for welfare and child protection was rated above satisfactory and in the top quartile of LEAs, with support for health and safety also rated above satisfactory.

174. There are clearly defined policies in place and schools are well supported in developing their own policies and procedures for health and safety. The LEA has substantially revised its existing comprehensive code of practice on outdoor education in order to reflect recent national issues. Training on organising school visits and activities is available for school and community education staff. The LEA also provides a 'crisis line' service to support schools on a round the clock basis. Staff involved provide training and support for schools wishing to draw up their own policy and procedures in the event of an emergency.

175. In relation to welfare and child protection, the LEA takes sound steps to meet its statutory obligations and is fully represented on the area and child protection committee and its relevant sub-committees. Child protection activity is accorded high priority within the education department. The designated teacher for child protection in a school is the headteacher; this has long been the policy for Leicestershire. All new and acting headteachers receive a visit and support regarding child protection from the relevant service manager. The LEA has carried out an audit of schools' involvement in child protection training .

176. The relationship between education and social services at the strategic level is effective. A new post of child protection development officer has been created. A major role for the future postholder will be the development of a comprehensive LEA child protection training programme.

Looked after children

177. This aspect of the LEA's work was not inspected in 1998. Support for looked after children is currently highly satisfactory, as is the capacity for further improvement in this area. Strengths include a clear focus on raising pupils' achievement in all major plans and an increasingly effective working relationship between the education and social services

department. A number of developments over the last two years have resulted in substantial improvements in attendance but have not yet led to similar improvements in levels of attainment. Cohorts of pupils are small. In 2001/2002, out of 20 pupils, 12 were entered for GCSE. All gained at least one grade A* - G, but only two gained five such grades. The number of permanent exclusions of looked after children has remained low, at one per year between 2000 and 2002.

178. The council has taken corporate responsibility for the educational achievement and pastoral care of children in its care through its corporate parenting steering group on which there is a cabinet representative. This group receives regular progress reports.

179. A satisfactory joint policy statement enables education and social services to work together in developing policy and processes to address the recognised underachievement of this group of vulnerable children. The local authority has recognised the need to focus support more effectively and the two departments are currently developing joint local PSA targets. These are aimed at accelerating the predicted attainment of looked after children between Key Stages 1 and 2 and improving education, training and employment outcomes for young people leaving care.

180. The LEA has placed a high priority on improving and expanding its services for looked after children. In order to extend support to those in community as well as residential placements, an existing small team of teachers has been increased from four to eight. Two specialist education welfare officer posts have been established in order, amongst other things, to improve communications between the operational services of the two departments and schools. However, one of these posts remains vacant, as do two of the teaching posts. This has hampered the planned extension of support and limited attempts at forward planning for changes in the placement of looked after children.

181. Staff from across the education department recognise their responsibilities with regard to improving the attainment of looked after children. The 'caring about reading' project was initiated by the library service and involves educational psychologists as well as library staff in working with foster carers and residential care workers to improve their understanding of how to support children's reading development. This is to be further developed as part of the local PSA process. An LEA literacy consultant is a member of the planning team looking at how to raise attainment in Key Stage 2.

182. At the time of the inspection, 153 looked after children were of school age. A joint social services and education database enables regular analyses of attendance and attainment to be undertaken. It also contains information on exclusions, special educational needs and changes of school. A network of designated teachers has been established and the social services department has published helpful, informative guidance on their role. Joint training for these teachers with social workers has focused on supporting the education of looked after children and multi-agency working.

Measures to combat racism

183. This aspect was not inspected at the last inspection. Progress within the education directorate has been highly satisfactory. Schools rate LEA support for combating racism as

above satisfactory although feedback at the recent annual EDP conference indicated that schools wanted more support and training to develop greater race awareness. Progress at a corporate level however, to meet the council's duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 has been slow. The overall provision is satisfactory.

184. Although the LEA responded early on to the recommendations of the report arising from the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (1999), this did not happen corporately. In 2001, the council responded to the report and its new statutory duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act by undertaking an audit across council services using the Commission for Racial Equality standards. A corporate race equality policy has now been approved by cabinet and a complementary policy developed within the education department. The draft race equality scheme has also been approved and is currently the subject of consultation. Corporate responsibility for race issues has not been formally assigned and interim arrangements are in place within the chief executive's department. Although the profile of the workforce is monitored, as yet, there are no equality targets set.

185. Within the education department, a strategic monitoring group for race, chaired by the director of education, was established to consider the outcomes of the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and to develop an action plan. Guidance and clear criteria have been provided for schools to record racial incidents. To date, these are rare but where reported, the LEA has taken effective action in collaboration with other agencies, including the Charnwood Race Equality Council (REC). The first annual return from schools on racist incidents takes place in March 2003.

186. The LEA has published comprehensive guidance for schools and colleges on multicultural and anti-racist education. This has been well received. In addition, a model policy on race equality has been made available in response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, and the LEA has supported and closely monitored the process whereby schools have adopted their policies by the required date. At the Foundation Stage, the LEA has published very good guidance on anti-bias education for this age range which is supported by a rolling programme of training as new settings apply for validation. The LEA offers an appropriate and flexible range of training for schools and governors on multicultural and anti-racist education.

187. There is some consultation with local minority ethnic communities but it is not systematic. The LEA has a positive working relationship with the Charnwood REC and this has been particularly evident in individual casework undertaken jointly with the REC and police.

Recommendation

In order to improve the measures to combat racism:

- involve the Race Equality Council at an earlier stage in policy development and planning.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Introduction to corporate issues

188. There has been a long tradition of strong cross-party support for education as a priority of the council throughout the many years when there was no political group in overall control. The inspection of 1998 judged the quality of political leadership to be highly satisfactory. This strong support for education has continued with the current political administration since the election in June 2001. For the first time, there is a medium term corporate strategy in place that builds on the administration's election manifesto and reflects national and service priorities for education. The clarity and coherence of corporate planning is now improving and provides a sound framework for education in the county. The recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment resulted in an overall grade two (out of three) for the council and acknowledged the improvements in corporate planning. However, the assessment also identified the need to increase the pace, capacity and systems for change in order to implement and monitor priority improvements to service delivery. This reflects issues and areas for development within the education directorate too.

Corporate planning

189. The inspection of 1998 did not include judgements on corporate planning. Corporate planning is satisfactory.

190. The establishment in June 2001 of a single party administration brought about for the first time the development of a medium term corporate strategy. The strategy sets out clearly the key objectives that will guide the work of the council up to 2005. 'Achieving excellence in education and learning' is one of nine key objectives for the council. This objective is defined further into five broad aims for education, reflecting to a large extent an appropriate agenda for the LEA and priorities within the education development plan. As yet, there is no over-arching community plan, although the draft plan for consultation draws on these corporate objectives and is scheduled for publication in spring 2003. The corporate planning cycle is linked appropriately to the production and review of the Best Value Performance Plan and the production of service plans, but links with the financial planning cycle are not sufficiently integrated. There is no history of medium term financial planning to underpin corporate objectives. Within the education department, the education strategic plan is closely aligned to the corporate objectives and to the EDP, and includes clear priorities, targets and responsibilities at departmental level. This in turn is underpinned by a series of sound service plans

191. There are sound procedures for monitoring the implementation of corporate plans. Monitoring of performance against national targets takes place half-yearly and is reported to members of the executive and scrutiny functions. Within the education department, there are effective performance management arrangements in place which ensure regular reviews of progress against targets in service plans and statutory plans. Clear processes for accountability have been built into the education strategic plan and the EDP.

Decision making

192. Corporate decision-making procedures, including those for finance, are satisfactory. The LEA has been effective in explaining to schools the general situation regarding education funding. There is a satisfactory budget setting process that means timely financial decisions are made enabling schools to receive their budget notification in early March. The cabinet structure ensures that major decisions are taken openly and are subject to scrutiny arrangements. However, despite these arrangements, there are examples of where there has been a failure to consult fully with schools or where schools perceive, rightly or wrongly, a lack of transparency on the part of the LEA.

193. Schools have opportunities to be involved in decision-making, as illustrated by the decision of headteachers not to accept the delegation of the funding for SEN statements. Schools also recognise that elected members and officers are prepared to listen and to act accordingly. However, a more fundamental issue relates to the quality and effectiveness of the consultation process. It is too variable. The information provided for schools does not always fully reflect the wider picture, nor an analysis of the implications for other elements of the education service.

The leadership provided by officers and elected members

194. The quality of leadership given by elected members was highly satisfactory at the last inspection; it is now satisfactory. There has been a long history of cross-party support for education as a council priority. This has continued with the new administration. The lead member for education has a clear view of the priorities for education, particularly in relation to raising standards, and works closely with the director of education. Members' relationships with schools recognise and promote their autonomy in accordance with the Code of Practice on LEA-school relations. Schools appreciate the efforts of elected members over many years to commit additional funding for education.

195. The advice provided to elected members is satisfactory. Officers ensure that lead members are kept well informed of key policy issues through regular briefings and meetings. They generally have a good understanding of the performance of the education department and schools. The education scrutiny committee is having an increasing influence after a slow start and is fulfilling its role effectively. The committee receives regular reports on the performance of schools and progress on the implementation of the EDP and has effectively scrutinised decisions made by the executive. The committee has been successful in establishing a members' review panel to consider issues relating to teacher recruitment and retention, the outcomes of which informed the strategic planning for this priority within the current EDP.

196. The quality of leadership provided by senior officers was highly satisfactory at the last inspection; it is now satisfactory. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA was forging a new relationship with schools in the aftermath of local government reorganisation and in the context of the national agenda for local education authorities. A commitment to consultation with schools was in evidence. Since that time, the LEA has clearly demonstrated its leadership of school improvement and its strategy has been effectively developed with, and communicated to, all schools. Senior officers have been particularly effective in taking

on new national school improvement initiatives and adapting them successfully to the context of schools in Leicestershire where they are having a demonstrable effect on standards of teaching and learning. They have demonstrated their commitment to consult and to involve schools in these developments. Day to day management of the department is good. Where they have been less successful is in developing their strategic leadership role in relation to the partnership with schools.

197. The previous inspection report noted the culture of the LEA; the tradition of autonomy within the upper schools and the questioning by some schools of the LEA's right and obligation to intervene. However, it also noted the desire of all schools to work together with the LEA and their welcome of the greater clarity in direction at that time. This willingness to work with the LEA is still very much in evidence but there is also a sense of frustration on the part of some schools that the LEA is not more confident and consistent in its leadership role. The LEA is seen by some schools to be reactive rather than proactive. The issue of a common age of transfer from primary to secondary education is one such example. The LEA has convincing evidence that the mixed age of transfer does not adversely affect pupil performance at the end of Key Stage 3. However, it has been slow to share these findings more widely and thus clarify for schools that a uniform transfer system is not part of the future policy for the county.

Recommendations

In order to clarify the LEA's policy for school organisation:

- in collaboration with partners, reaffirm the policy for the organisation of schools in the county; and
- provide stakeholders and partners with a clear indication of which developments are priorities, and when they intend to achieve them.

198. While many aspects of the partnership between the LEA and schools have been clarified, particularly in relation to the school improvement function, consultation, communication and decision-making in relation to SEN and social inclusion are less well understood by schools. In particular, communication between the LEA and schools remains a concern for some schools despite the longstanding channels of communication. The LEA has acknowledged these concerns and recently published a new communications policy. It is now incumbent upon both schools and the LEA to ensure that any perceived weaknesses in communication and consultation are fully addressed in light of this policy.

Partnership

199. The last inspection judged the council's partnership work in support of priorities across several agencies highly satisfactory, and this remains the case. The LEA works effectively with an increasing range of partners to raise achievement and to promote social inclusion. The director of education, in keeping with all chief officers of the council, is expected to give a high priority to partnership work. All partnerships have been identified corporately and categorised to determine the guidance to be given to officers and members working in them. The director shows personal commitment to a number of partnerships such

as Connexions; a member of the education directorate management team was seconded to take a leading role in the establishment of Connexions.

200. Partnership working with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is being developed and the transfer of post-16 funding was managed efficiently. Regular liaison and planning meetings take place between senior officers of the LEA and LSC concerning the development of the 14-19 education strategy for the county. However, the next and important stage of this relationship has not been helped by the slow progress of the BVR of youth and community provision in the county.

201. There are good relationships with the diocesan authorities, particularly in relation to schools requiring additional support. The dioceses appreciate their working relationship with the LEA for its openness and accessibility. The LEA's support for the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) is good. The LEA has a good working relationship with the Charnwood Race Equality Council, particularly for individual casework. Partnership working between the education and social services directorates is effective. The co-ordinated database for looked after children and the effective liaison arrangements for child protection are good examples of collaborative working. There are sound working relationships with the health and police authorities.

Support for early years

202. The LEA provides good support for the care and education of young children in a range of settings. The school improvement service and the pupil and student support service work in close partnership with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP). There is a coherent strategy focused on national and local priorities, which is increasing access, particularly in areas of disadvantage. The quality and consistency of provision in both maintained and non-maintained sectors are improving. The integration of plans has resulted in a seamless operation. Well-led and managed teams of staff with a wide range of experience and common expectations work together very effectively across settings. Good progress has been made in meeting and, in some cases, exceeding targets.

203. Highly satisfactory procedures for auditing and monitoring provision has led to well-targeted intervention and high quality training that is increasingly matched to specific need and linked to the development of practice. Work with other teams is highly effective. The recent work on anti-bias education is one example of excellent collaboration that is influencing how teachers think and work. The strategy for raising standards in the foundation stage is very well integrated with literacy and numeracy strategies and good guidance, training and support have been provided for the large number of schools where reception children are taught in mixed age classes. Plans to improve the quality and use of data are well-advanced.

204. The partnership has matured into one that has a breadth of vision, is self-evaluative and responsive to new demands. Officers and elected members provide effective and balanced support to the partnership. Respective roles and responsibilities for planning and budgetary decisions are clearly defined and very well understood. The partnership is committed to social inclusion on a broad front. Work in areas of deprivation is increasingly

well targeted and the LEA has been successful in closing the childcare gap and in exceeding targets for provision in areas of disadvantage.

205. Although the LEA has been slow to increase the provision of places for four year-olds in school, following criticism in the previous report, government targets have been met across the county and universal provision for three year-olds will be achieved ahead of time. The decision to develop a common admissions policy as a long-term aim has enabled non-maintained settings to remain viable and to make a significant contribution in enabling the LEA to meet the needs of three year-olds.

Appendix: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:

In order to improve the effectiveness of provision for special educational needs:

- revise and implement, as a matter of urgency, the strategy for providing for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties to ensure that it is coherent with the support that schools receive to prevent exclusions.

In order to improve the strategy for special educational needs:

- re-engage stakeholders, including parents, pupils and particularly schools in discussions about the practical implications of the principles upon which the strategy is built and on progress to date; and
- produce and implement as soon as possible plans which identify clearly a timetable for intended actions, the allocation of responsibilities and resources to support these actions.

In order to improve the strategy to promote social inclusion:

- move swiftly to produce, and then implement, plans which detail the priorities and timetable for action, together with the responsibilities and resources identified.

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

In order for stakeholders to reach an informed and agreed position on the most appropriate level of delegation of funding for Leicestershire:

- all items of central expenditure should be subject to consultation to establish their priority and their level of funding.

In order to improve transparency and effectiveness in the allocation of resources to schools:

- establish a regular and systematic review of all elements of the funding formula for schools.

In order to improve the value for money of provision for special educational needs:

- establish and implement procedures for monitoring the use, and evaluating the effectiveness, of schools' expenditure on SEN whether from their own budgets or from resources allocated through statements of special educational need.
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In order to improve support for behaviour:

- provide prompt support for children at risk of exclusion; and
- establish access to support in early years settings and primary schools for pupils at risk of exclusion.

In order to clarify the LEA's policy for school organisation:

- in collaboration with partners, reaffirm the policy for the organisation of schools in the county; and
- provide stakeholders and partners with a clear indication of which developments are priorities, and when they intend to achieve them.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to track improvements and demonstrate added value:

- services should produce regular reports on their performance against standards. These should be sent to all clients and to the appropriate scrutiny committee.

In order to support schools in their long-term planning to raise standards in ICT and in promoting its use across the curriculum:

- publish and clearly explain to schools plans for the implementation of the LEA's strategy for curriculum ICT;
- evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies; and
- develop ways of systematically spreading good practice.

In order to increase schools' financial management capacity:

- develop and implement a strategy for the service with relevant actions, timescales and resources identified.

In order to improve the predictive capacity of the LEA's database on school performance:

- include a set of financial data agreed with schools.

In order to improve consistency in the amount and quality of advice and support provided by the educational psychology service:

- discuss and identify with schools their concerns;
 - identify alternative means of providing the support required by schools; and
 - establish and implement a training, recruitment and retention strategy for
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educational psychologists.

In order to further improve asset management:

- identify how the funding gap to meet identified need will be met;
- establish robust systems for ensuring the property database is regularly updated to include school generated works;
- tell schools where they are on the priority list of major works; and;
- establish a system to share knowledge with schools about the integrated use of LEA and school funding streams.

In order to improve provision for teenage mothers:

- ensure that young mothers of school age and beyond have opportunities to return to and continue their education, through cooperation and partnerships between social services, schools and colleges of further education.

In order to improve the measures to combat racism:

- involve the Race Equality Council at an earlier stage in policy development and planning.

Appendix 2

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	2	
2	The performance of schools	3	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	6	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	3	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	3	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	5	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	4	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	2	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
10	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	4	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	1	
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	1	
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	2	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	2	
17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	2	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	3	X

19	Support to school governors	3	
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	3	
20a	Financial services	4	
20b	Human resources	3	
20c	Property services	2	
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	3	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	3	
20f	Grounds maintenance	3	
20g	Catering	3	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	4	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	2	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	2	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	3	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	3	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	2	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	4	
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	6	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	3	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	5	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	5	

34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	4	
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	4	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	X
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	4	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	5	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	3	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	3	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	4	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	4	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	4	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	4	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	4	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	4	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	4	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	3	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	4	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	4	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	4	

Note: An X in the 'NI' column means that fieldwork was not conducted on this function during this inspection.

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

Grade 1 – Very good

Grade 2 – Good

Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory

Grade 4 – Satisfactory

Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory

Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses

Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools