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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
THE ISLE OF WIGHT
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (July 1999)* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on best value.
2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA Members, focus groups of headteachers, governors and co-ordinators for special education needs, staff in the education and community development directorate and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 80 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to eight primary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, one special school and one tutorial centre. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support, provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. The Isle of Wight became the first of the new unitary authorities in 1995. The island has some areas with significant levels of disadvantage. Levels of unemployment are higher than average and there is a heavy reliance on seasonal and part-time work in tourism. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is close to the national average. Throughout the island, schools are organised in a three-tier system with transfer at nine and thirteen. Standards in schools are mostly in line with national averages and rates of improvement are similar to those found nationally. In about a quarter of schools there is underachievement.

5. The LEA and the schools benefit from having clear boundaries and a strong sense of identity and community of interest. The common sense of purpose and collegiality shared by schools and officers is a strong feature of the LEA. The small size of the island and easy access to officers enable schools to benefit from a rapid and effective response to particular needs and, where appropriate, the delivery of cross-service work. Schools have confidence in the LEA and work in partnership with officers. The LEA monitoring programme allows for appropriate differentiation of activity according to the needs of schools, but there is scope for delegation of funding to allow successful schools to make their own decisions about the levels of support they receive.

6. Physical separation of the island, coupled with costly ferry crossings, serves to heighten geographical isolation. Professional isolation, together with a high degree of stability of staffing has contributed to complacency and low expectations in some schools which is proving difficult to shift. The LEA is starting to challenge underachievement more vigorously and officers are no longer holding back from intervention until the problem becomes critical. Officers also work effectively to breakdown professional isolation through, for example, securing a good range of external consultancy and other support.

7. At the corporate level strategic planning and partnership working have been inadequate. A strategy for improvement is developing but the corporate strategy is still too slow to emerge. In particular, there is a lack of corporate planning processes linked to objectives for individual services. Members do not take a sufficient lead and are not involved early enough in the process of decision-making and policy formulation and in the monitoring and scrutiny of service expenditure. At an operational level there are encouraging examples of joint working, for instance in the provision and support for early years and for children in public care.

8. Until recently, strategic planning in the education department has also been under-developed with monitoring and evaluation strategies not informed by sharply defined success criteria. Strategic thinking, action and implementation have been more advanced and coherent than some written plans, and significantly the Education Development Plan, would suggest. Education planning has been strengthened by a new draft strategic plan but more needs to be done before the directorate communicates clearly through written plans how strategic objectives are to be met, resourced, monitored and evaluated.

9. The senior management team within the education department has operated for significant periods without some key staff in place. This has not prevented notable

improvements being made, for example, the development of a focused inspectorate and advisory service and the formulation of effective admissions arrangements. It has, however, constrained progress in some areas. In Special Educational Needs (SEN) planning for improvements has been incremental and not based on a thorough review. There is no clear strategy for SEN and arrangements for monitoring the quality of SEN provision are inadequate.

10. Following the appointment of a new Chief Executive, the Council's departments have been restructured. The new directorate of education and community development was created in November 1999 and has a full complement of staff. The director and his senior team provide effective leadership and deploy services well to support school improvement. The LEA is increasingly making a valuable contribution to school improvement and is successfully discharging the majority of its functions, although much remains to be achieved. In particular the LEA now performs the following functions particularly effectively:

- support to schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses;
- training in the analysis and use of performance data;
- support for school management;
- monitoring of schools;
- support for numeracy and literacy;
- management of school places and asset management planning;
- admissions to schools; and
- provision of personnel, premises and financial support services to schools.

11. The following functions are not performed adequately:

- corporate and strategic planning;
- support for some key aspects of special educational needs; and
- the provision of education other than at school.

12. There are shortcomings at the corporate level but, overall, within the education and community development directorate strengths outweigh weaknesses. Weaknesses within education, although small in number, are nonetheless highly significant, but the LEA is aware of them and has, for the most part, promising strategies for improvement. Officers have won the trust and goodwill of schools. With more energetic and focused support from members, they are capable of carrying out the recommendations in this report.

SECTION ONE: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. In 1995, the Isle of Wight became the first of the new unitary authorities. The Council serves a population of around 125,000 of which the school age population is around 19,000. There is a strong sense of identity and community of interest, which is fully shared by schools.

14. The island is economically as well as physically separated from the mainland. Costly ferry crossings serve to increase geographic isolation and have a negative impact on the socio-economic development of the island. The island has pockets of disadvantage and four of the 33 electoral wards on the island are among the most deprived 10 per cent of wards nationally. These wards account for just over a fifth of the school population. Levels of unemployment are higher than average and for many islanders there is a heavy reliance on seasonal and part-time work in tourism, with lengthy spells of unemployment.

15. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals (21.4 per cent in primary and 19.6 per cent in secondary) is in line with national averages; however, levels in individual schools vary considerably from seven per cent to over 50 per cent. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) in secondary schools (4.4 per cent) has decreased in recent years and is now broadly in line with national figures (3.9 per cent). At primary level, the percentage of pupils with statements of SEN (4.2 per cent) is well above the national average (2.6 per cent). The percentage of island pupils educated in special schools is above the national average, with proportions for primary aged pupils much higher than average. Very few pupils have English as an additional language and only a few are from minority ethnic communities.

16. Schools in the Isle of Wight are organised in a three-tier system. Forty-six primary schools educate pupils aged 4-9; of these, three have nursery classes. Sixteen middle schools admit pupils aged 9-13; and five high schools educate students aged 13-19. The Authority maintains two special schools. In addition 44 of the 46 primary schools have a private or voluntary pre-school on site. The LEA offers a place to every four-year-old whose parents wish it and there is provision of free places for 60 per cent of three-year-olds.

Performance

17. A detailed analysis of performance of schools was supplied to the LEA in an OFSTED profile. It highlights these features of performance:

- Attainment on entry to reception classes is broadly in line with national averages;
- In English at Key Stage 2, standards are in line with the national average. Standards in mathematics at Key Stage 2 rose by 16 per cent between 1998 and 1999, but they remain below the national average;
- GCSE and GCE 'A' level performance is broadly in line with national averages,

although there is variation between individual schools;

- Rates of improvement in attainment at Key Stage 2 and GCSE between 1996–9 are broadly in line with national figures;
- The results of OFSTED school inspections present a mixed picture. The percentage of primary schools graded good or very good is above the national average. At middle school level, the island has more schools that require some improvement, fewer very good schools in terms of standards and more schools requiring improvement in terms of management and efficiency. Standards in the five high schools are broadly in line with like schools and overall the schools are graded good. The quality of school management has improved between the first and second cycle of OFSTED inspections, most notably in primary schools;
- In both primary and secondary schools, attendance and authorised absence are in line with national figures. Unauthorised absence is below average in both cases;
- Permanent exclusions are below the national average in secondary schools and well below the national average in primary schools;
- Two primary schools have been awarded beacon status;
- Since OFSTED inspections began in 1993, two schools have required special measures. Both made good progress and have been removed from the special measures category. Since September 1997, two establishments (one pupil referral unit (PRU) and one primary school) have been judged by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses; the PRU has since closed. A further four schools (one primary and three middle schools) have been identified by the LEA as a cause for concern.

Funding

18. The Isle of Wight's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for primary and secondary pupils is close to the national average and per pupil slightly above the unitary average. Over the last six years the LEA's spending on education has been very close to SSA, although it dipped to 98.4 per cent in 1995/96 and to 98.5 per cent in 1998/99.

19. The total Standards Fund budget for the Island has increased from £1.73 million in 1998/99 to just over £4 million in 2000/01. The LEA aims to match-fund its allocation fully but the steep growth is putting considerable strain on the LEA budget.

20. Capital investment in education is primarily based on the LEA's Annual Capital Guidelines entitlement, although from 1997/98 to 1999/00 this was supplemented by a successful £10m Capital Challenge bid which contributed to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, sports facilities, and major repairs in schools. The 1999 budget of £6.7m, £294 per pupil, was over twice as high as the unitary and national averages and reflected the LEA's need to provide additional school places for its growing school roll. The good quality and condition of school buildings reflects this investment.

21. The Council exercises good financial control and prudent financial management

but, as in a number of authorities, budget planning has been based on incremental changes to the previous year's budget and not firmly linked to strategic objectives. There is now a three-year budget plan with a commitment to funding education at SSA and protecting school budgets. The Chief Executive is rightly committed to making decisions about the budget more transparent and involving members earlier in the scrutiny of the process. However, this is still at an early stage.

22. The LEA increased significantly delegation to schools in 2000/01 to 83.1%. This is slightly below the national average of 84.2%. The increase was the result of delegating a number of services to schools, including school meals and some SEN support, worth a total of £2.7m.

23. The Isle of Wight's spending on SEN has increased steadily over the last few years and, in particular, spending per pupil on provision for pupils with statements is over twice the national average. In 2000/01 the combined effect of increased delegation and the re-allocation of some expenditure was to reduce centrally-held spending on strategic management, school improvement and access to below the national average for unitary authorities. SEN expenditure at £246 per pupil remained considerably higher than the national average of £198 per pupil. In 2000/01 the LEA made changes to the funding arrangements for SEN in order to delegate more money through the school funding formula to support pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice (see paragraph 99 below). One of the aims of this was to reduce the need and incentive to statement pupils but it is too early to judge whether this will be effective as a means of controlling expenditure.

24. Although there has been regular consultation about the school funding formula, it has changed relatively little in the last few years. The LEA has rightly directed additional monies to primary schools as a result of a needs-based review of funding of the sectors. The formula for allocating funds to schools includes a high level of pupil-led funding (83 per cent) with SEN funding (3.5 per cent) based on a free school meals index. The effect is to produce relatively little differentiation between schools of a similar size but with different needs.

Council Structure

25. Since 1997 no party has had overall control; Liberal Democrats and Conservatives are the largest of six parties, with 18 and 13 of the 48 seats respectively. The committee structure has recently been modernised. The Executive, with proportional representation of the parties, meets weekly, and one member holds the education and lifelong learning portfolio. Select committees, meeting in public, came into operation in June 2000, with a remit to monitor and review policy decisions and their implementation; to receive evidence; and, to consider policy proposals. The membership of the education, community development and lifelong learning select committee is eight councillors and, when considering education matters, two diocesan and two parent governors with voting rights. Arrangements are being considered to include representatives of the Council's other partners in the decision-making process. Although the new arrangements are a feasible combination of modernisation and openness, the structure has only just replaced a traditional education committee and it is too early to judge its impact.

The Education Development Plan

26. The major vehicle for the LEA's strategy for school improvement is the Education Development Plan (EDP). The plan has approval for three years (subject to the condition that modifications are made to the section on schools causing concern) and was implemented from April 1999. Schools and governing bodies were consulted well during the development stages of the plan. Priorities reflect the national agenda appropriately and also draw on a detailed external audit to provide links with local needs. From the evidence of visits and responses to the school survey, schools consider that the strategy is clear and priorities relevant.

27. The six priority areas are:

- Raising standards of literacy across the key stages;
- Raising achievement in mathematics, including numeracy across all key stages;
- Improve access to, and use of, ICT across the phases;
- Raising the educational achievement of children with special educational needs;
- Raising the educational aspirations and expectations of students, parents and teachers;
- Improve the leadership, management and governance of schools.

28. The LEA has recently (May 2000) produced a second edition of the EDP. This new version is based on the same priorities but represents improvement over the original plan. For example, the activities and actions for literacy, numeracy and leadership and management are more coherent. The section on guidance and practice for schools requiring additional support is clearer and much improved and, on the basis of improvements, the DfEE has approved the EDP for 2000-02. A good number of activities are differentiated to meet the needs of specific groups such as the more able, post-16 and children in public care. Success criteria have been improved to include many more that are measurable and appropriately focused on improving quality. The plan is sensibly costed.

29. However, shortcomings remain. There is insufficient explicit reference to, and linkages with, other strategic and statutory plans. Success criteria still vary in their specificity and do not always represent in full or relate sufficiently to the actions being suggested. The overall coherence and consistency of the plan is constrained by revisions that were only partial. For example, audit information and the rationale for the priorities were not always updated in light of new data and evidence of progress made. The section on setting and agreeing performance targets is largely unchanged and does not reflect the improved current practice in this area.

30. Despite shortcomings, the implementation of the EDP is leading to improvement. In numeracy, literacy and ICT progress has been significant. In these areas steering groups made up of officers, headteacher and teacher representatives have undertaken thorough monitoring and evaluation as plans have been implemented. In other areas more modest, but nevertheless sound, progress has been made. The LEA has recognised a need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation and the revised EDP sets out tighter procedures for each priority area and for the plan as a whole. Involvement of headteachers has been strengthened appropriately and there are suitable plans for Members to be involved in the process of monitoring and evaluation as part of an EDP

evaluation panel.

31. The targets set are, in the main, appropriate and realistic. Good progress has been made towards GCSE targets and those set for reducing permanent exclusions. Progress has also been made by middle schools in meeting their Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy targets. However, much still needs to be done if schools are to reach the challenging literacy target of 82 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 or above by 2002 (paragraph 46). The numeracy target of 70 per cent of pupils attaining at least Level 4 by 2002 is already well on the way to being achieved (paragraph 49).

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities and Best Value

32. In the past, the Council planning process has been insufficiently policy led and has been budget driven, based on incremental changes to previous year's budgets. There is now a three-year budget plan and there has been recent progress in linking the budget-setting process to corporate objectives and involving members earlier. Although recent efforts to put a strategic planning system in place are expected to lead to change once a corporate plan is elaborated, progress has been too slow. Members' role in monitoring and scrutiny of service expenditure requires speedy development.

33. There is a clearer planning framework within the education and community development directorate based primarily on the EDP and on recently formulated service plans. Resources are targeted well to priorities in the revised version of the EDP for 2000/2001. Most education services are efficient and effective and are viewed positively by their users.

34. The Council published its Local Performance Plan in accordance with statutory requirements. Although the District Auditor approved the plan, his report highlighted the lack of a corporate planning process linked to objectives for individual services. The Local Performance Plan is not yet integrated fully into the timetable for developing its corporate planning framework (paragraph 74).

Recommendations

In order to ensure that SEN funding is based on a more direct measure of need:

- the SEN index in the formula should be reviewed before any further delegation of SEN funding.

In order to improve the Education Development Plan, future revisions should:

- strengthen the links between the EDP and other corporate, directorate and statutory plans; and
- have robust success criteria for all actions to enable effective monitoring and evaluation.

SECTION TWO: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implication of other functions

35. The EDP defines the LEA's priorities for school improvement, but other functions and services make a significant contribution. For example, capital investment has helped ensure school buildings are in good condition. The infrastructure provided for schools through management services, especially those for finance, personnel and premises, create an effective support framework which allows headteachers to concentrate on school improvement. Link inspectors are effective in co-ordinating a cross-service approach to planning and offering support for schools, especially those experiencing difficulties or which are a cause for concern. There is effective leadership of services deployed to support school improvement.

36. The recent management review of SEN services in September 1999 has brought about improvement to the quality of SEN support. However, the absence of a clear SEN strategy and the lack of arrangements to monitor the quality of SEN provision are weaknesses that reduce the overall effectiveness of the school improvement strategy.

Monitoring, Challenge, Support, Intervention

37. The LEA has a clear understanding of these key functions, which has been shared fully with schools. The principles of raising standards, developing school self-management and focusing most energy and resources on those schools causing concern are clearly evident in the LEA's work with schools. The relationship between the LEA and its schools is constructive, based on sound levels of consultation and effective partnership arrangements. Most schools have been quick to recognise the implications of the code of practice on LEA-school relations and appreciate the shift towards building autonomy. However, a minority has been slow to accept change; for example, about a fifth of schools wish to see an extended advisory team and do not appreciate fully that this move would be neither cost-effective nor sensible.

38. The small team of five inspectors and two consultants (one for literacy and one for numeracy) is central to supporting, monitoring, intervening in and challenging schools. The team is well led and contains staff with a good range of experience; for instance, most of the team have recent and relevant headship experience from infant to high school. Inspectors are deployed well, appropriately in line with priorities in the EDP and sensibly in a way that makes good use of individual expertise. The team focuses support on areas of greatest need. Arrangements for induction, training and performance management are helping to ensure a consistency of approach. The team is generally held in high regard by schools and it provides good value for money.

39. The school monitoring programme offers a basic minimum of twelve hours to all schools to cover a core programme including target setting, performance review and feedback to governing bodies. Where the need for improvement is greatest, or there is a particular cause for concern, further time is allocated appropriately in proportion to the need for improvement. Precise categories that define the level of concern and any associated support are shared and agreed with schools. The focus, timing and purpose of any visits are appropriately discussed and agreed at an early stage in the monitoring

programme and the emphasis of the work is sensibly moving towards a system of validating school self-review (paragraph 63). Most schools visited rate LEA monitoring highly; even the most successful schools could give examples of where they had been challenged and encouraged by link inspectors to “improve even further”. Although the system allows for appropriate differentiation according to the needs of the schools, there is scope for delegation of funding to schools so that successful schools can decide for themselves the levels of support they wish to purchase.

40. Visits to schools are followed up with a brief written summary of key points. The majority of summary reports seen are good and provide a useful focus for the work of inspectors with schools. However, there is variation in quality and a significant minority tend towards description rather than rigorous analysis and evaluation. The LEA has recently introduced an annual written report to governing bodies. The report has a useful format, and is prepared by link inspectors in conjunction with headteachers. Although not all schools visited have yet received such a report, headteachers saw value in the process and governors considered them to be a step forward from the present system of oral feedback.

41. Insularity, coupled with a high degree of stability in staffing, has contributed to complacency and low expectations that, in a few schools, is proving difficult to shift. The LEA does much to help to counteract professional isolation and breakdown insularity. For example, by actively seeking collaboration with other LEAs and agencies to secure reasonably priced, good quality in-service education and school-based support. Much has also been achieved in actively seeking and attracting applicants from the mainland for school posts, especially those for senior management teams, and for LEA officer vacancies. Support is also enhanced and extended by the LEA making good use of expertise and good practice found within island schools.

42. The LEA is starting to challenge underachievement more vigorously and officers are no longer holding back from intervention until the problem becomes critical. Data is increasingly being used effectively in the LEA intervention strategy and in challenging under-performance and complacency. Most schools visited, especially those in need of intensive support, accept the value of a more rigorous approach and welcome a higher level of challenge. The majority of schools visited understand target setting. However, the degree of challenge in target setting is not consistent across all schools. For about a quarter of schools visited there has been a lack of attention given to identifying realistic curricular and teaching strategies to help ensure progress is made.

Collection and Analysis of Data

43. Support for the collection and analysis of performance data is good. It enables schools to interpret their performance in comparison with other schools and provides the tools for setting challenging targets. By providing training for headteachers and governors in using the data for self-evaluation, the LEA is increasingly effective in challenging under-achievement and complacency in some schools. The strategy is well led.

44. The LEA's three tier school organisation, with transfer at the ages of nine and thirteen poses additional challenges to schools in the interpretation of data and pupils'

progress. To help schools overcome these the LEA has rightly introduced a range of assessment instruments and data analysis to supplement the information provided by National Curriculum (NC) tests and the centrally produced Autumn Package of Pupil Performance Information. The LEA has also negotiated that all primary schools use the optional Y4 NC tests. A developing strength of the system is that individual pupil data has been in existence long enough for schools to start analysing added value. All schools are provided with a summary of their results in a format that makes comparisons with other schools easy. Middle and high schools receive a printout of results for the individual pupils transferring to them. Elected members and governors spoke appreciatively of the impact of data on school improvement and the quality of advice and training received.

45. The LEA has made promising efforts to continue to strengthen the use of data and looks forward to further improvement. For example, new software, currently being used by inspectors and some pilot schools, facilitates comparison with schools in other subscribing LEAs, including some of the LEA's statistical neighbours.

Support for Literacy

46. Support for raising standards in literacy is of good quality and focused appropriately on addressing issues of leadership and management of literacy in schools. A productive start has been made to implementing the strategy but developments will need to be pursued with even greater rigour if the LEA is to reach its challenging literacy targets. In the 1999 national KS2 English tests, 68% of pupils achieved level 4 or above. This was an increase of 5% from the previous year, in line with national progress, but 3% below the LEA target. The aggregate of schools target for 2001 is 7% below the LEA target of 81%. Further improvement of 14% is needed to achieve the target for 2002. These are significant problems but there are plans to tackle them. The LEA is intensifying its support even further in those few schools where there is low expectation. Part funding, topped up by the LEA, has also been secured for an additional teacher consultant from September and a team of leading literacy teachers and expert headteachers is being established.

47. The LEA has been concerned that in a few of the primary and middle schools, senior staff have been slow to accept the need for focused intervention to raise standards of individual pupils. These are being tackled as part of a programme of well targeted intensive support for eight primary and eight middle schools. There was evidence from schools visited of productive use of joint lesson observation and good demonstration lessons. Support for schools has also usefully included expert consultancy from the mainland on using test data to set group and individual literacy targets. Appropriate emphasis is given to working with schools to improve the achievement of boys. Notes of visits, which are thorough and contain practical advice, are shared with link inspectors for monitoring during their school visits. Able and talented pupils are targeted appropriately to achieve higher NC levels, with inputs from a literature development officer and professional writers supported by Southern Arts.

48. One of the five inspectors, an English specialist, provides good leadership and monitors the strategy. There is also a full time consultant who provides effective training and support and who is well regarded by schools. Learning support assistants have received effective training for the Additional Literacy Strategy and training in the literacy hour has been offered to supply teachers. There are good links with the

Numeracy team and with the learning support service, whose staff have received the National Literacy Strategy training.

Support for Numeracy

49. Support for raising standards of numeracy is of good quality and is beginning to effect necessary improvements. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) was pre-empted by a prompt LEA response to poor KS2 results in 1998. The LEA action brought about a substantial improvement in 1999, with the percentage of pupils reaching level 4 rising by 16% (6% more than nationally). A further 6% improvement is needed to reach the 2002 target of 70%. The prospect of reaching the target is good and the target no longer looks too challenging. However, a further set of results is sensibly awaited before revisions are considered.

50. As with literacy, the LEA has identified concerns about the leadership and management of numeracy and the implementation of the NNS in a minority of schools, largely middle schools. These are being tackled as part of the programme of intensive support for twelve middle schools in the current year and all have made progress in developing and implementing numeracy action plans.

51. The inspector with responsibility for numeracy and the numeracy consultant give effective leadership. Both have recent mainland headship experience and are successful in challenging and supporting headteachers and their staff. The initial NNS training enthused many of the participants and was followed by a high profile conference which raised the status of mathematics teaching. There is a good range of initiatives to support able pupils. For instance, with DfEE funding and LEA support, one of the high schools organised a successful mathematics Masterclass over 20 Saturdays for able but underachieving KS3 pupils in middle schools.

52. There was evidence from the schools visited of good support for auditing provision, joint lesson observation, effective demonstration lessons and benefit from observing leading mathematics teachers in other schools. Good notes of visit are shared with the literacy team and link inspectors, who monitor progress during their visits. An additional consultant has been appointed for September to strengthen the LEA team.

53. The LEA has wisely augmented its own resources through a service level agreement with University College, Chichester for support across the four key stages. This provides a range of INSET which can be accredited at advanced diploma and MA level, and a research project targeting underachievement at KS3. Those schools which have taken part find this support to be of good quality and well matched to the NNS.

Support for Information and Communication Technology

54. The LEA has clear strategies for information and communication technology (ICT) and the National Grid for Learning which build successfully on the good practice found in island schools, especially the high schools.

55. In 1998 the LEA carried out a thorough audit of equipment and staff skills.

Following consultation with schools, it was decided to go for a “managed solution” for

the Island's schools, based on one provider. This decision, and the lead taken by the LEA, with additional investment through the Capital Challenge programme, is generally appreciated by schools, although this entailed a change of equipment for some schools and there have been some teething problems in getting the new stations and networks fully operational. Training has been provided for network managers in middle schools.

56. All schools had ICT development plans by July 1999 and link inspectors are monitoring their implementation. The staff training elements of these plans fit the LEA training strategy for all staff, including support staff, to have ICT competence in databases, spreadsheets, Internet and email. Evidence from school visits shows a good correlation between school ICT plans and LEA support. Basic training, being secured by the LEA, includes the imaginative use of specialist staff in the high schools to work with primary and middle schools in their cluster. All schools' plans show completion of New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training against the TTA competencies by July 2003. Helpful guidance on NOF training providers followed a visit to a national exhibition by a large group of headteachers and demonstrations on the island by the shortlisted providers.

57. Inspection evidence since 1996 shows progress in line with the national picture in Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, but somewhat less satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Now that appropriate hardware is in place, the LEA is rightly turning its attention to support for the curriculum. Subject user groups are being established and the new literacy and numeracy teacher consultants have been appointed partly on the basis of their ability to enhance the use of ICT in literacy and numeracy. As a way of appropriately strengthening support further, the LEA is increasing consultancy support for ICT through two teacher secondments. The LEA's strategy makes productive use of existing expertise in the LEA and its schools and represents good value for money.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

58. Support for schools causing concern is satisfactory overall and very effective for those schools with serious weaknesses or subject to special measures. Since OFSTED inspections began in 1993, two schools have required special measures. These schools had good support, which led to rapid and sustained improvement, resulting, for both, in removal from special measures within two years. In addition, two establishments, a pupil referral unit (PRU) and a primary school have been judged to have serious weaknesses. Although good progress was secured, the PRU has recently been closed as part of the LEA's re-organisation of the provision for pupils educated other than at school. Through its own processes, the LEA has identified four further schools (one primary and three middle) as giving serious cause for concern.

59. Visits to schools confirm that, in the past, there have been shortcomings in the identification of, and intervention in, weak and under-performing schools. For a few schools, action was tardy and insufficiently vigorous. In response to a condition imposed within the approval of the original EDP, the LEA has sharpened its strategy and processes for identifying and supporting schools requiring additional support. Procedures are now much tighter with clearer judgement criteria for defining schools requiring support.

60. The LEA approach to supporting schools causing concern is set appropriately

within the context of its overall school improvement strategy. All schools are placed, with the agreement and knowledge of schools, in one of four categories which determine the level of LEA support received. Appropriate and intensive support is given to those schools in greatest need. Where necessary, seconded headteachers and deputies are used effectively to strengthen school management. More recently, the LEA has intervened appropriately by writing formally to the governing bodies of two schools where they had serious and just concerns about the performance of the headteachers. Governors of these schools appreciated the professional way in which the LEA carried out its duties and the quality of the report received. In both cases the action by the LEA allowed issues to be tackled promptly and new headteacher appointments to be made.

61. Schools visited, which either were or still are a cause for concern, confirmed a number of strengths in the LEA support. For instance, there is a well co-ordinated cross-service approach to needs identification and offering support for schools with the most severe difficulties. For all schools causing concern, the link inspector and senior inspector work together effectively in offering support and monitoring progress against an agreed action plan. The focus of all support, whether from seconded staff or from LEA officers, is designed appropriately to build the capacity of governors and school senior management teams to manage their own affairs and solve their own problems.

Support for School Management

62. Support for school senior management is very good. A major priority for the LEA has been to improve the quality of leadership and management in a substantial minority of primary and middle schools. Particular pressing needs have been to improve the use of performance data and to challenge complacency and underachievement. Inspection evidence indicates that the quality of school management has improved between the first and second cycle of OFSTED inspections, most notably in primary schools where improvement has been greater than the national picture. Most schools visited identify LEA support and challenge as a critical factor in improvement, citing as particularly important the training for the analysis and use of performance data, the well focused LEA monitoring programme and the highly rated new programme of training and development in school self-evaluation. Schools and LEA officers recognise that more needs to be accomplished, principally in a minority of middle schools, where the challenge of underachievement stubbornly remains. There is, however, a will in most schools visited to work in partnership with the LEA to improve standards and meet targets.

63. The range of support offered to school senior management teams represents a coherent programme of activities and a clear strategy for improvement. In those schools visited which have benefited most, either through receiving intensive support as a school with weaknesses or by embarking on a programme of school self-review, there is a much more focused approach to school-based monitoring and review. For more successful schools, LEA monitoring is appropriately moving towards supporting school autonomy by validating the school's own monitoring. For example, in one school, the link inspector had used work sampling as a way of confirming judgements reached by the senior management team through their own observation of classroom practice.

64. The LEA promotes an appropriate range of continuing professional development

opportunities for headteachers and senior managers. These include providing opportunities for experienced headteachers to act as mentors for newer colleagues, seconding competent managers and leaders to give support to weak schools and maximising funding to enable as many senior managers as possible to attend national training programmes.

65. The arrangements for monitoring and supporting newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are appropriate and work well. Schools have received appropriate training and support for using the new procedures for monitoring and assessing NQTs. The LEA quality assurance arrangements are well established.

66. The LEA gives appropriate attention, through its own small team, to improving the skills and competence of middle managers. For example, meetings for SEN co-ordinators and literacy and numeracy co-ordinators contribute to their understanding of national issues. In those schools benefiting from intensive support for numeracy and literacy, consultants have placed appropriate emphasis on developing the competence of subject leaders. Good examples of effective support were identified in primary and middle schools visited where consultants have worked alongside subject leaders to assess the quality of teaching and learning across the school and to feed back findings to staff. For subject leaders in middle and high schools, the LEA has established, in partnership with West Sussex LEA, a framework of training and support linked to the national standards for subject leaders. Those schools visited which have taken part find the programme to be of high quality. The LEA recognises that more is needed, especially to develop subject leaders in the foundation subjects. There are firm plans to extend support through the setting up of middle management steering groups, establishing subject development plans and through identifying and securing good quality support to meet needs.

67. The schools and LEA recognise the importance of maximising continuity and progression as pupils move through a system with split key stages. The LEA is taking positive steps to improve liaison between schools. For example, it has promoted the development of cluster group partnerships of primary, middle and high schools. Literacy and numeracy consultants convene cross-phase cluster group meetings for information exchange, dissemination of ideas and increasingly agreeing standards of work.

Support for School Governors

68. Overall support for governors is satisfactory. Newsletters and other mechanisms for keeping governors informed are valued. There is an appropriate range of training opportunities and sound arrangements for the induction of new governors. Governors appreciate the opportunities afforded them to meet and work with officers, including the director of education and community development. However, governors in about a quarter of schools visited would welcome regular, programmed meetings with senior officers and more involvement in consultation and decision making.

69. The LEA is committed to improving provision for governing bodies and a working group has been established to consider ways to improve provision and support for governors. Good support is given to governing bodies in schools that have weaknesses or are a cause for concern. In these schools especially the LEA has actively supported governors in developing their role of strategic leadership and

accountability. Focused support has enabled governors to move rapidly from a position where they act as silent witnesses towards one where they engage in a more effective partnership based on support and challenge.

70. The new annual written report for governing bodies, presented to governors by the headteacher and link inspector, is considered by most representatives interviewed as a step forward from link inspector oral feedback where analysis and evaluation have not always been clear.

71. A recent recruitment drive has been successful in filling most LEA governor vacancies; however, longstanding LEA governor vacancies remain in two schools.

Support for Early Years

72. The LEA is making a positive contribution to raising the standards achieved in early years settings. An early years unit, run jointly by education and social services, provides training, advice, support and information on all aspects of care and education for the early years. There are effective and well co-ordinated links between staff in the unit and the inspectorate. In one school visited, for example, joint working in close partnership with the school had led to significant improvement in the quality of provision in the reception classes. Appropriately focused early years training courses are available to all those working with young children in the maintained, voluntary and private sector. An agreed set of early childhood principles, a commendable quality assurance framework and good guidance materials are used purposefully to promote quality provision.

73. The LEA has only three mainstream nurseries. However, there are well-developed links between the authority and the Island Pre-School Learning Alliance. Contracts exist between pre-schools and their feeder primary schools, which allows for strong liaison and flexibility for children to transfer as they become ready for school. The LEA has improved significantly its provision of places for the early years. A place is now offered to every four-year-old whose parents wish it with further provision of free places for 60 per cent of three-year-olds.

Recommendations

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

- improve the quality of analysis and evaluation in all written reports to the standard set by the best; and
- ensure that the degree of challenge in target setting is consistent across all schools, and appropriate emphasis is given during the target setting process to identifying realistic curricular and teaching strategies.

In order to improve support for governors:

- act swiftly to fill outstanding LEA governor vacancies.

SECTION THREE: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

74. Strategic planning on a corporate basis is under-developed and until recently has been given insufficient attention and resources. The aims adopted by the Council in 1997 were very general and have not been translated into coherent strategic plans, although some progress is now being made under the leadership of the chief executive, a new post from the beginning of 1999. The Council's departments have been restructured and the new education and community development directorate came into existence from November 1999. The Chief Executive's strategy is clear and focused on building individual service plans, which have only recently been standardised, and undertaking community consultation to formulate a corporate plan for the Council. This is planned over three years, which considering the requirements of Best Value, is too slow. The lack of clear political leadership, coupled with the resolutely local focus of many members, has restricted progress.

75. The Council has formally transferred its economic development responsibilities to the Isle of Wight Partnership, a company limited by guarantee. This gives a sensible focus for the major stakeholders in island life, especially the business community. It has produced a good strategic plan underpinned, in respect of education, by a well-written local learning plan which is overseen by a partnership chaired by the Council's executive member for education. This is just beginning to be implemented and has useful links to the priorities in the EDP.

76. In the education directorate prioritisation of work, action and implementation are better than written plans would suggest. Education planning has been strengthened by a new draft strategic plan, which is ready for consultation with partners. The main intent is for the strategic plan to provide coherence and links with other statutory plans and the individual service plans within the directorate. However, more needs to be done before the directorate communicates clearly through its set of plans how the strategic objectives are to be met, resourced, monitored and evaluated.

77. The director gives clear, well-informed and timely advice to members. Education Committee decisions are taken with the interests of pupils at the forefront and not taken on party lines. The officers' advice is usually followed. However, members are not involved early enough in the process of decision making and policy formulation.

78. The director and his senior team give effective leadership to the education service and have won the confidence of headteachers and governing bodies. The Director has taken useful steps to widen the horizons of schools. These include carrying out an island viewpoint survey in partnership with the University of London Institute of Education. The project involved surveying the opinion of all teachers, pupils and parents, analysing data and encouraging and supporting schools to act on the results.

79. The size and nature of the LEA mean that lines of communication are short. This enables the LEA to respond quickly and effectively to individual schools. It can also assist when the LEA needs to consult its partners at short notice, but in some cases it has led to consultation that is too informal.

80. The LEA has good partnership arrangements and relationships with a number of local agencies. In particular, partnership with the Rural Community Council (especially on early years) is good and there are good links with the Isle of Wight College on post-16 matters. There are encouraging examples of joint funding and management of posts with social services, for instance for early years and children in public care. However, beyond these, improved collaboration at a strategic level has not been translated into consistent co-operation and operation at school level. The new leading corporate role of the director of education and community development on social inclusion coupled with improvements and changes within social services provides an overdue opportunity to improve the co-ordination of services to schools.

Management Services

81. The management services offered by the education and community development directorate are good value for money and highly valued by schools. Nearly all schools buy these services from the LEA. Finance, personnel and premises services are particularly highly regarded. A strength of these services, as with others offered by the LEA, is the responsiveness of the small teams of officers to schools' requests and their good knowledge of the schools they support. The recent delegation of budgets for most of the management services is regarded by many schools as a paper exercise, as most have opted to buy back services. However, the service level agreements were welcomed by many because they clarify the service they should expect. Although some schools are beginning to assess the value for money and cost effectiveness of LEA services, they are insufficiently involved in reviewing the performance of services. Such involvement is a particularly important source of challenge since there are few alternative providers of services available to island schools. The services will be reviewed in the autumn as part of a Best Value review of the LEA's planning and resources functions.

82. Financial support: The local management of schools officers' (LMSO) service is very good. It is responsive, efficient and officers have a close working relationship with schools. The LMSOs are active both in supporting new headteachers and in training and liaising with link inspectors and governors over financial information and management. The LEA has developed a good range of financial benchmarking information, which allows schools to compare themselves with other Island schools of similar size and type. Schools particularly value the LMSOs' knowledge of imminent changes to school funding and their ability to disseminate good practice. The finance officers of schools which do not purchase the service are invited to regular meetings to update them on changes in the funding systems.

83. School visits and responses to the school survey confirmed that the LMSO service is highly valued by schools and is considered good value for money. The sound financial performance of schools is testimony to its effectiveness.

84. Personnel: The personnel team provides a very good, responsive and effective service. Its administration of the appointments process contributed to schools' very positive view of the payroll service, and it provides useful guidance, including model forms and job descriptions, for the schools handbook. Personnel advice and support and the payroll service are highly valued by schools and considered excellent value for money. However, the service's ability to be proactive, particularly in involving schools

more actively in the management of the growing level of longer-term sickness absence, is limited by the team's small size and the administrative demands arising from the increased volume of new school appointments.

85. Asset management planning and premises support: The LEA is very effective in asset management planning and in supporting schools with their premises responsibilities. It has produced a clear and detailed local policy statement and has established a comprehensive property database on compact disc. There are close links with school organisation and class-size planning as well as with the EDP. Suitability surveys are completed ahead of time. School buildings are in good condition and there is evidence of considerable recent capital investment, while the condition surveys show spending needs are mainly in non-urgent categories. Schools are clear about the LEA's priorities for capital investment and those visited agreed that the allocation process is fair.

86. Building work is very well managed by the premises development officers and there is close involvement of schools in planning projects, with different options being presented within the available budget.

87. Premises repairs and maintenance services are offered under a property indemnity insurance service level agreement in collaboration with the corporate property services team and all schools have bought into this. Links with schools are strong: they receive an annual monitoring visit from their building inspector, who attends a governing body meeting once a year, and many schools visited spoke highly of the knowledge and responsiveness of the LEA managers. Schools had a clear understanding of the service under the SLA and, although work is largely reactive, most schools had seen some benefit from their contribution to the pooled maintenance budget. Emergency support was reported to be excellent.

88. The views of the schools visited were confirmed by the very positive responses to the school survey on items relating to premises and building maintenance.

89. Support for ICT in administration: Since April 2000 SIMS support has been provided under a service level agreement by an LEA-based team of three technicians and in-house helpdesk staff. Technical support through the helpline is satisfactory while training and guidance booklets are good. The schools visited were positive about the responsiveness of the helpline service when a technician was available but some had had to wait for on-site visits. Though schools have ISDN access to the Internet, electronic links between schools and the LEA are not yet in place. However, the LEA has a clear development strategy, including the piloting of broadband technology to speed up access.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- accelerate the rate of progress on the production of corporate plans and establish firmer links with the Best Value processes;
- engage members fully in policy development and scrutiny; and
- improve the coherence of various plans produced by the directorate.

In order to ensure LEA-provided management services to schools remain good value for money:

- establish procedures for reviewing the performance and cost-effectiveness of services in collaboration with schools.

SECTION FOUR: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

90. Overall, the provision for special education needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. The LEA has yet to establish a clear strategy to increase the inclusion of SEN pupils and the arrangements for the quality assurance of SEN provision are inadequate. However, SEN provision and services are in transition and action is already being taken to remedy weaknesses.

Strategy

91. The LEA is working towards a more coherent strategy. Until recently there have been major weaknesses in the management and planning of SEN, and serious shortcomings in SEN administration. A management review in September 1999 brought together different LEA services and gave a clearer and coherent structure to the management of SEN services.

92. The LEA has held some discussion and information sessions about steps towards inclusion. Following the input of an external consultant the LEA has worked with a small group of partners, including schools, to formulate a draft strategy and proposals for the future provision of SEN, including the role of special schools. Consultations on the proposals are scheduled from September 2000, and implementation planned to start in April 2001. Most of the schools visited are supportive of the LEA's determination to develop inclusion by creating resourced provision in mainstream schools; however, at the moment most are unable to say clearly what this will mean for their school and they are understandably anxious about the future provision of SEN support in their schools.

93. In the past, SEN development plans have lacked overall cohesion and improvements have been incremental and not based on a thorough review. Nevertheless, a number of sound, practical initiatives have been implemented since 1995. For instance, the LEA has achieved some success in transferring resources from special schools to the mainstream sector. A resourced unit for primary-aged children with speech and language difficulties, based on a primary school site, is proving successful and is being further developed. The Island's Pathways scheme, based on the SEN Code of Practice, provides a sound structure for schools to make decisions about individual needs. However, the inconsistent application of the criteria and the lack of moderation between schools limit its effectiveness.

Support for School Improvement

94. SEN statements are of a satisfactory standard. Through a multi-agency support team, the authority has established regular dialogue between services providing support for young children with special educational needs. This is leading to better pre-school assessment and significant improvement in the drafting and securing of statements prior to entry to school. It is, however, recognised by all concerned that this is only a beginning and that further improvements are necessary.

95. Overall, the support given to schools by SEN services is satisfactory. The improved coherence and line management of SEN administration and SEN support services is leading to a sharper focus and better co-ordination of services to schools. In particular, learning support is well focused and is mostly providing what schools

need; for instance, support for implementing individual education plans for pupils on the SEN register. Most special educational need co-ordinators interviewed appreciate the training, guidance and development opportunities provided through courses and LEA supported cluster meetings. However, whilst most schools are satisfied with the support provided by educational psychologists (EPs), there is variation in the quality of service. For example, about a third of schools visited have experienced inadequate cover for absent colleagues or insufficient time for early intervention or preventative work.

96. Although work has started on updating many of the LEA policies and working documents the information is too diffuse and not comprehensively laid out for ease of reference and the understanding of those using the documentation in schools.

Statutory Obligations and value for money

97. The LEA has improved its practice in issuing statements within 18 weeks. In 1997/98 the proportion was below the national average but is now above that level. School visits indicate that delays still occur, but most report that the LEA is now completing final assessment within the prescribed time.

98. At the time of the inspection the LEA was failing to comply with Code of Practice guidance to initiate annual reviews. The LEA was aware of this shortcoming and had already taken steps to assume responsibility by writing to schools and parents of children whose annual reviews were imminent. In addition, a new database containing a detailed up-to-date SEN register will be in use from September 2000 to generate reminders about annual reviews and to support the review process.

99. Genuine efforts are being made to control SEN expenditure (paragraph 23) and to transfer resources in a way that will meet individual as well as group needs in a range of appropriate settings. The LEA has made changes to the funding arrangements for pupils with statements of learning and behavioural difficulty to release more funds to support pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice. In addition, funding for such statements had been allocated through a cash sum rather than hours. These measures give increased flexibility to schools in deciding on the best way to allocate provision according to the needs of the pupil. It is, however, too early to judge whether changes will be effective in controlling expenditure or in improving the quality of provision for SEN pupils. Schools are clear about the resources allocated and these broadly match the pattern and level of need. Although the majority of schools visited are keeping careful records of SEN expenditure, it is a significant shortcoming that there is no systematic monitoring to ensure that the provision set out in statements is being made. Although SEN is accorded a high priority in the EDP, at the time of the inspection there were no effective systems to monitor or review progress and attainment of pupils with SEN, particularly in relation to the significant investment made in supporting them. At this stage the LEA has no effective means of judging whether services provide value for money.

Recommendations

In order to improve the quality of SEN support for schools:

- comply fully with the statutory requirement to initiate annual reviews;

- ensure that the planned programme for consultation, development and implementation of a clear strategy for SEN proceeds according to the set timescale;
- ensure that the strategy:
 - is clearly communicated and understood by LEA personnel, school staff and governors;
 - includes effective procedures for monitoring of the quality of SEN provision;
 - has robust systems and structures for evaluating the progress made by SEN pupils and for making judgements about value for money; and
- improve the links and coherence between the separate SEN service plans and policy documentation.

SECTION FIVE: ACCESS

Planning of school places

100. The LEA has effective and pragmatic arrangements for the supply of school places which maximise parental choice.

101. The School Organisation Plan is sound and was approved by the School Organisation Committee in January 2000. It complies with statutory requirements and takes good account of the inclusion of pupils with SEN. The roll projections are soundly based. The LEA has made good progress in the implementation of its Infant Class Size Plan and expects to have no infant classes of over 30 from September 2000.

102. There are very few surplus places and the policy is to provide sufficient capacity to meet the rising demand through expansion of existing schools. The LEA works closely with the DfEE on Basic Need bids and has been generally successful in gaining capital allocations. The LEA allows schools to set their own admissions number based on their curriculum and organisation and a significant minority of schools, especially in the primary sector, set these higher than their externally defined capacity. The move to this system was based on extensive consultation with schools, parents and dioceses and led to an immediate drop in the number of appeals. Although the external auditor has expressed concern that it could lead to much lower space allocations per pupil in some schools, the schools visited were not over crowded and were positive about the arrangements.

Admissions

103. Admissions arrangements in the Isle of Wight are very effective and highly regarded by schools and most parents. The island is divided into a number of designated entitlement areas of linked primary, middle and high schools and children are guaranteed a place at their entitlement area school. These arrangements are effective in reducing the number of unsuccessful applications. In September 1999, 98 per cent of parents were offered their first choice of school. There were few appeals and none were successful.

104. The education committee decided not to set up an admissions forum because of the lack of cross-border movement and because of the existing requirement for formal consultation each year on admissions with the headteachers, governing bodies and dioceses who would be represented on the forum.

105. The admissions function is provided by a multi-purpose team which has recently been commended under the Chartermark scheme. It is effectively organised and uses trained administrative staff to run the reception desk, give information to parents about school places and liaise with schools on admissions. The admissions booklet is comprehensive and highly informative with clear information on the admission procedures. Service standards are specified in a widely available document, 'Our Commitment to You'. An annual survey of the parents whose children have joined a school is carried out and the most recent showed high levels of satisfaction with the process. In response to the Audit Commission survey, schools had positive views of the accessibility and completeness of information on admissions and of the efficiency and effectiveness of the LEA's handling of admissions appeals.

Behaviour Support

106. Data from school inspections show that the behaviour of pupils is slightly better at primary level and significantly better at secondary when compared with schools nationally. In addition, LEA exclusion figures are significantly lower than those found nationally. Both permanent and fixed term exclusions have been reduced consistently since 1997/98.

107. From the evidence of school visits, the quality of LEA support for behaviour is satisfactory overall and good in primary schools. The LEA has initiated many projects and training courses specifically linked to improving behaviour. These have, in the main, been appreciated by schools and in those schools visited have largely been successful in bringing about improvement. Most outreach provision from the Behaviour Support Service is considered by schools visited to be of a satisfactory or better quality.

108. As with the EDP, the implementation of the Behaviour Support Plan is better than the written plan would suggest. The plan is adequate but it makes insufficient reference to the targets for the reduction in non-attendance and exclusion. These have, however, been appropriately covered within the EDP. The plan is strong on provision and provides a useful guide to schools on the range of services available. It is, however, weak on monitoring and evaluation strategies.

Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School

109. There is a detailed and up-to-date list of just over one hundred children who are out of school because of parental choice, exclusion or for medical reasons. There are currently about 30 pupils receiving support from the home tuition service because of a medical condition or, in the case of a few, because they have been permanently excluded from school. The provision for these pupils is too variable. It ranges from three to 25 hours, but most get five or fewer allocated hours. The criteria for allocating time for each pupil are not clear.

110. The LEA recognises that improvements are necessary and, from September 2000, is changing its provision for all pupils educated otherwise than at school. For example, the LEA is supporting high school headteachers in their decision to develop their own on-site provision to deal with difficult pupils. In addition, two tuition centres are being established to provide for pupils who are unable to attend schools, including those permanently excluded. They will have a complement of permanent members of staff. It is too early to judge if these changes will bring about improvement in the quality of provision for pupils educated other than at school. In particular, there is still a lack of clarity regarding time allocation and, as yet, no indication of how the quality of provision will be evaluated or how pupils' performance will be monitored.

111. There are almost 80 children being educated out of school through parental choice. Annual visits are made by an Education Welfare Officer (EWO), with a detailed descriptive report produced which is scrutinised by a senior education officer. There is insufficient evaluative judgement within written reports of the quality and appropriateness of educational provision made for these pupils.

Attendance

112. With the exception of unauthorised absence, which is below average, all other attendance figures for the LEA are broadly in line with national averages. LEA attendance targets are realistic and good progress is being made towards meeting them.

113. The work of the EWOs is generally appreciated by the schools visited. However, in a quarter of schools visited insufficient cover for illness and failure to feedback from home visits create a less than satisfactory service. The provision of an educational welfare assistant to work alongside the EWO has been well received by most schools visited.

114. The LEA is offering appropriate support and guidance to the few schools where levels of authorised absence are high. For instance, in one high school visited an electronic registration system has been used to gather immediate information about those pupils absent from school. Prompt follow-up to the parents of these pupils has resulted in an improvement in attendance. The LEA has also been supporting schools by using the local media to reinforce the importance of regular attendance and to inform parents about the issues and legal requirements relating to attendance at school. Evidence from schools visited suggests that this strategy is making parents more aware of their responsibilities.

Health, Safety, Child Protection and Welfare

115. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for health and safety, child protection and pupils' welfare. The Area Child Protection Committee procedures are detailed and clear. A recent child protection training day was run in collaboration with social services and the NSPCC and recruited a large number of teachers from schools, and staff from the specialist support services and tuition centres. The content of this course provided a timely reminder of important issues and procedures for those with a responsibility for child protection in schools or LEA centres. This is a good example of the multi-agency provision to which the LEA is now committed.

Children in Public Care

116. The provision for children in public care (CPC) is satisfactory. There is an accurate and up-to-date register, including information about attainment of CPC. This is maintained by the CPC co-ordinator, recently appointed by social services and education as part of a strategy for closer collaboration over CPC. Individual schools know their CPC well and confirm the accuracy of the LEA register. Targets are set for individuals based on information about prior attainment and test results. These individual targets are used to set the overall LEA target for CPC and, as far as possible, to predict future trends. Part of the role of the new CPC co-ordinator is to monitor progress and to ensure performance is improved.

Ethnic Minority Children

117. The quality of support for children of ethnic minority heritage, including Travellers, is satisfactory. The Isle of Wight has a lower proportion of ethnic minority pupils than the national average. There is an accurate list of pupils whose first language is not English, which includes a range of relevant data about performance, background and attendance. The teacher for English as an Additional Language (EAL) works with schools on a service level agreement basis. The criteria for school-based support work from this teacher are clear and relate appropriately to National Curriculum levels for English. The EAL service development plan is satisfactory overall but lacks well defined success criteria and clear evaluation and monitoring strategies.

Promoting Social Inclusion

118. The Council is committed to promoting social inclusion and has set up a cross-directorate working group on social inclusion, chaired by the Director of Education and Community Development. Appropriate attention is given within EDP priorities to raising the attainment, provision and support for vulnerable pupils. Although the activities do not constitute a coherent programme of action, the LEA is involved in a number of useful ventures designed to promote social inclusion. For example, the implementation of a Connexions pilot aimed at supporting teenagers. This venture is a partnership with neighbouring LEAs and in conjunction with other island agencies,

119. There has also been some effective work relating to combating disaffection. For instance, the successful Pupil Inclusion Project (PIP) which targeted middle school pupils likely to be excluded and which helped to reduce exclusions. To reduce permanent exclusions in the high schools, a non-exclusion strategy has been agreed. This has been used successfully to transfer four high school pupils over the last year. Procedures are clear and well managed and involve parents and pupils working with schools and EWOs.

120. Appropriate action was taken in response to the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. For instance, a letter and Home Office publication have been sent to schools and arrangements made for racist incidents to be reported to the LEA. Schools visited were aware of the requirement to report racial incidents and had done so.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that stakeholders are represented appropriately in the admissions process:

- keep the need for an admissions forum under review.

In order to improve its provision for children educated otherwise:

- improve and increase the quality and quantity of LEA educational provision for pupils who are not in school; and
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of LEA support for these pupils.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the Educational Development Plan, the LEA should ensure that future revisions:

- strengthen the links between the EDP and other corporate, directorate and statutory plans; and
- have robust success criteria for all actions to enable effective monitoring and evaluation.

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

- improve the quality analysis and evaluation of all written reports to the standard set by the best; and
- ensure that the degree of challenge in target setting is consistent across all schools, and appropriate emphasis is given during the target setting process to identifying realistic curricular and teaching strategies.

In order to improve support for governors:

- act swiftly to fill outstanding LEA governor vacancies.

In order to improve strategic management:

- accelerate the rate of progress on the production of corporate plans and establish firmer links with the Best Value processes;
- engage Members fully in policy development and scrutiny; and
- improve the coherence of various plans produced by the Directorate.

In order to ensure LEA-provided management services to schools remain good value for money:

- establish procedures for reviewing the performance and cost-effectiveness of services in collaboration with schools.

In order to ensure that SEN funding is based on a more direct measure of need:

- the SEN index in the formula should be reviewed before any further delegation of SEN funding.

In order to improve the quality of SEN support for schools:

- comply fully with the statutory requirements to initiate annual reviews;
- ensure that the planned programme for consultation, development and implementation of a clear strategy for SEN proceeds according to the set timescale;
- ensure that the strategy:

- is clearly communicated and understood by LEA personnel, school staff and governors;
- includes effective procedures for the monitoring of SEN provision;
- has robust systems and structures for evaluating the progress made by SEN pupils and for making judgements about value for money ; and
- improve the links and coherence between the separate SEN service plans and policy documentation

In order to ensure that stakeholders are represented appropriately in the admissions process:

- keep the need for an admissions forum under review.

In order to improve its provision for children educated otherwise:

- improve and increase the quality and quantity of LEA educational provision for pupils who are not in school; and
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of LEA support for these pupils.

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