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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF  
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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AUDIT COMMISSION**

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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* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 198 schools. The response rate was 70 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 15 primary, one middle (deemed secondary), eight secondary, four special schools and one education support centre (pupil referral unit). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence was also drawn from HMI reports on schools in which literacy or numeracy had been inspected and HMI reports on schools requiring special measures or those with serious weaknesses.

## COMMENTARY

4. Hertfordshire is a large county with a population in excess of one million. Overall the county is advantaged although a small number of communities present significant challenges. The level of unemployment is well below the national average; the proportion of adults with higher education qualifications is higher than is found nationally and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is above average and they continue to attain standards which are higher than those achieved nationally from Key Stage 1 to GCSE. Attainment at GCE Advanced level, however, is in line with national norms. Standards are rising in Hertfordshire schools faster than the national rates, but schools with similar characteristics have differing levels of achievement.

5. The schools, their pupils and communities in Hertfordshire are well supported by a very good and rapidly improving LEA which has many considerable strengths and very few weaknesses. It has the capacity and desire to address aspects of its work which do not come up to its own expectations. Indeed, it has already identified its weaknesses and is beginning to address them through the Education Development Plan. The LEA provides good value for money through its efficient and effective use of resources.

6. There is a strong corporate commitment to education across the County Council, encouraged, in the main, by the Chief Executive and the Director of Education. The Council ensures that education spending is at or just above the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and, in turn, delegates a high proportion of the budget to its schools. While schools appreciate this high level of delegated funding, many of them still expect levels of support greater than is feasible.

7. The Director has been in post for just over two years, during which time the Department has effectively refocused its work to enable it to know its schools better and respond to them more appropriately. This was much needed. The LEA had, until the last two years, lost sight of its schools and many of its services focused excessively on income generation. It was during this period that a number of schools were identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures. This shocked the LEA. However, the appointment of the new Director created a determination to ensure that the LEA would be influential in school improvement. The work of the LEA is now beginning to have an impact on improved quality and standards of attainment in primary, and to a lesser extent in secondary schools. The LEA needs to know its schools better, particularly those with which it lost contact when they became grant maintained. It is for this reason that a differentiated programme of diagnostic monitoring of all schools has begun. Monitoring and support now need to be accompanied by much greater challenge. In the case of schools causing concern, or likely to fall into this category, the LEA's intervention has resulted in often rapid improvement. It is anticipated that, through the implementation of the thorough and detailed Education Development Plan, the LEA will contribute further to improvements in standards and quality.

8. The following functions are exercised very well:-

- relationships with other services and agencies;
- support for school governors;
- support for schools causing concern or those likely to do so;
- developments in early years;
- the collection and analysis of data;
- support for special educational provision;
- support for attendance;
- support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage;
- support for health, safety, welfare and child protection;
- financial management;
- financial services, and
- personnel services.

9. The functions below are exercised satisfactorily:-

- consultation with schools over major plans;
- support for management;
- support for teaching;
- management of the supply of school places;
- support for behaviour;
- support for literacy and numeracy;
- support for target setting;
- arrangements for admissions to primary and secondary schools, and
- management of the supply of secondary school places.

10. The following functions are not exercised adequately:-

- support for information and communications technology (ICT), and
- monitoring of buildings and maintenance services to schools.

11. The LEA has made significant improvement in a short time. There are clear indications that this rapid progress will be sustained and will contribute to the LEA's ability to raise standards further in Hertfordshire.

## **SECTION ONE**

### **THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

#### **Context**

12. Hertfordshire LEA serves a large county. Its southern boundary is just 13 miles from the centre of London. The population is in excess of one million, the vast majority of whom live in small to medium-size towns or in one of the large number of villages. Unemployment (1.9 per cent) is well below the national average (4.3 per cent). Four per cent of Hertfordshire's population is of minority ethnic heritage. The proportion of adults with higher education qualifications is above the national average: 17.6 per cent compared with 13.5 per cent. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is smaller than the national average: 10.3 per cent in primary compared with the national average of 19.9 per cent; seven per cent in secondary schools compared with the national average of 17.5 per cent. Seven and a half per cent of the school population is of minority ethnic heritage. The percentages of pupils with statements of special educational need are in line with the national averages (3.1 per cent in primary and 3.7 per cent in secondary schools). The school-age population is 223,400 of whom 172,328 are on roll in schools maintained by Hertfordshire LEA. Twenty-one per cent of children (5,923) are on the roll of under-fives classes (excluding nursery classes) in primary schools and 11,084 pupils are in nursery classes or schools. The number of pupils staying on post-16 education is 9,053 (81 per cent). There has been considerable post-war urban development and most of Hertfordshire's school premises have been built since 1950. Much of the stock is showing signs of ageing.

13. Since June 1999 there has been an overall Conservative majority of one; prior to this the Council was controlled by a joint administration of Labour and Liberal Democrats. The LEA currently maintains 17 nursery schools, 53 infant schools, 27 first schools, 52 junior schools, 294 junior and infant schools, nine middle (deemed secondary) schools, 77 secondary schools, 26 special schools and eight pupil referral units. This is not a report on those schools. A detailed analysis of their performance was supplied to the LEA in the form of the LEA Statistical Profile from which the following has been extracted:-

- Hertfordshire baseline assessment data shows that pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is above average;
- attainment at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in English and mathematics is above national averages;
- attainment of boys in literacy is lower than that of girls: at Key Stage 1 by nine per cent, Key Stage 2 by 14 per cent, and Key Stage 3 by 16 per cent;
- the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE A\*-C grade passes is above the national average; the proportion of those achieving at least one A\*-G is in line with the national average;
- the proportion of pupils attaining GCE A level or Advanced GNVQ certificates in two or more subjects is in line with the national average;

- standards are rising in Hertfordshire schools faster than the national rates;
- some schools with similar characteristics have differing levels of achievement;
- the quality of teaching in primary schools is in line with national figures; that in secondary schools is lower than national comparators in Key Stages 3 and 4; the number of Hertfordshire schools in need of substantial improvement is below the national average. One secondary and five primary schools are currently requiring special measures and, since September 1998, three primary schools have been found to have serious weaknesses;
- attendance is well above the national average in primary schools and above the national average in secondary schools;
- the proportion of pupils permanently excluded from primary schools is average; permanent exclusions from secondary schools are slightly below the national average.

## **Funding**

14. The County Council published its priorities in 1996 which included: 'boosting achievement for all, through supporting schools across the County and working with young people both in and outside school'. The recent change in political control has not changed this priority. The Council has consistently provided funding for the education service slightly above the level indicated in the Standard Spending Assessment.

15. The Standard Spending Assessment allocation for 1999-2000 is equivalent to £2,462 per pupil, the second highest for English counties and is above the national average of £2,362. The Council's three-year planning cycle provides a level of stability to the education service.

16. The Council operates a delegated system for the management of resources within departments. The Education Department has very good systems for financial management and maintains effective links with the corporate centre. Hertfordshire has provided a level of delegated funding to schools which has been slightly above the national averages for several years. For 1999-2000, 83.6 per cent of the Local Schools Budget is delegated, compared with 83.0 per cent for English counties and 82.8 per cent for statistical neighbours<sup>1</sup>. The amount of delegated funding per pupil is the second highest for English counties at £2,179. The LEA has good systems for budget allocation and monitoring, which are well-managed and responsive to schools' needs. This LEA has passed the full amount of the rise in education Standard Spending Assessment for 1999-2000 on to schools.

17. The introduction of Fair Funding has been straightforward in Hertfordshire and, because of previously high levels of delegation, has required only minor changes of practice. The funding formula for schools is reviewed annually. Schools receive good quality information about budgets, which enables them to plan in reasonable time. Those

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical neighbours – LEAs with characteristics similar to Hertfordshire: West Sussex, Essex, Kent, Bedfordshire, Surrey, Cheshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Lancashire.

schools that contract for the service receive high quality financial support. Members and senior departmental managers receive information that enables them to plan budgets and services effectively.

18. The LEA has embarked upon a fundamental review of the funding formula. Although the project is not yet concluded, the LEA is consulting over increasing the relative weighting for primary schools if there is any growth in the budget. Spending per primary school pupil is lower (£1,605) than in the LEA's statistical neighbours (£1,636), while spending per secondary pupil at £2,448 and special school pupil at £9,738, is higher than for statistical neighbours at £2,311 and £9,335 respectively.

19. With the exception of expenditure per pupil on special educational provision, £162 compared with £146, centrally managed budgets are at, or below, those for comparable authorities or England as a whole, with the cost of strategic management and central administration well below the average. Budget setting is well managed. Financial advice to schools is provided on a traded basis by the Financial Services to Schools Unit.

20. The Education Department has developed its own sound approach to performance management and review. There is a strong commitment within the LEA to review the effectiveness of its service delivery using a framework that will be consistent with the Best Value methodology of the Council. Education Service Reviews will be carried out annually, from January 1999, to inform the annual planning process. The five-stage process is based upon:- how well performance matches targets; how the targets compare with similar LEAs; what targets should be set for the subsequent year; what action must be undertaken to achieve the new targets; and what progress is being made towards achieving these. The LEA has established a Policy Development Group which has an evaluative role to play in the annual review timetable. This is a thorough and effective monitoring and evaluation process which firmly sets the Education Development Plan in the Department's routine activities, while enabling all its staff to recognise the contribution that they make to achieving the targets.

21. Hertfordshire has a comprehensive system of consulting with schools which includes Management Partnership Groups which meet regularly to consider the services provided by the Department's divisions. There are termly meetings for headteachers and governors, area meetings for consultations with phase groups, and paper-based consultation through which the LEA seeks to work in close partnership with schools. Clarity of school budget statements, advice and support on school financial matters, timeliness of financial information and consultation on the Local Management of Schools scheme are good: they are appreciated by schools.



## **Council Structure**

22. The Council consists of 77 elected members. Since June 1999, there has been an overall Conservative majority of one; prior to this, the Council was controlled by a joint administration of Labour and Liberal Democrats. The Council has reduced the number of committees. An Education Committee, reduced in size, is one of eight strategic committees reporting to Council. All sub-committees have been abolished; six education panels cover school provision and resources, pupil achievement and school improvement, special educational needs, student services, early years and young people. A corporate parenting panel deals with looked-after children, and ten local panels, mirroring the District council boundaries, comprise local County Councillors. These changes have not yet improved significantly the speed or efficiency of decision making. The Council is continuing to review its structure in the light of "Modernising Local Government". As part of the Council's response to Best Value, a single Improvement and Review Panel has been established to oversee the review programme: the first review of Services to Young People was completed in October 1999.

## **Education Development Plan**

23. The LEA firmly intends to 'make good better' and ensure that: individual pupils make maximum progress in their learning and wider development; all schools achieve improved standards as measured by end of key stage results, and targeted schools make accelerated progress. The Education Development Plan embraces the national priorities and is an excellent vehicle for the LEA's school improvement strategy. Outcome targets are set, not only for attainment, but for a wide range of aspects. A rigorous audit underpins the rationale for school improvement and the findings of OFSTED inspections are used appropriately as a baseline for target setting. The ten priority areas of activity which are intended to contribute to raising standards of individual pupil performance and the overall performance of schools are:-

- standards and the curriculum;
- staffing and training;
- school management and organisation;
- community education;
- behaviour and motivation;
- budget and assets;
- management information and communications;
- new technologies;
- special educational needs; and
- early years.

24. For each aspect of the school improvement programme the plan provides information about how it was identified from a local audit of needs and takes account of national priorities. The priorities are appropriate and the LEA has skilfully embraced the national agenda within its targets to meet local needs. The plan details the activities which will be started in the first year to meet the targets and the broad pattern of the tasks envisaged for the following years.

25. The LEA seeks to ensure that the following principles are firmly embedded in the Education Development Plan and promoted in all related aspects of work:-

- achievement;
- equality;
- quality;
- autonomy;
- community;
- accountability, and
- action.

26. The Education Development Plan began to be implemented in April 1999, in line with legislation, after full and responsive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders during which the LEA sought to share, and receive feedback on, its views, responsibilities and ambitions. The plan recognises schools as the main agents in the drive to raise standards. There are detailed action plans for each activity. The planning process attempts successfully to build upon a shared commitment towards improving pupils' standards of achievement, teaching, leadership, management and governance of its schools. Hertfordshire LEA is keen to identify the specific gains to pupils' achievement and school development that flow from its work, while making a strong commitment to partnership working.

27. The targets set are challenging, but the LEA is well-placed to achieve them. Examples of the statutory targets for 2002 are:-

Key Stage 2	English	88 per cent
Key Stage 2	Mathematics	81 per cent
16+	5+ A*-C GCSE (or equivalent)	62 per cent (indicative)
16+	At least 1 A*-G GCSE (or equivalent)	98 per cent (indicative)
16+	Average points score per pupil	43 (indicative)

28. Already, monitoring and evaluation are thorough and soundly established: reports on progress towards achieving the objectives have been made. The reports are appropriately detailed, indicate evidence of improvements, and provide a sound basis for further work. Monitoring, evaluation and setting further challenges sit comfortably within this LEA, which has sound procedures in place for these activities across the Department. The LEA matches appropriately its resources to priorities. For example, the LEA retains a central sum and targets this effectively in order to achieve the Education Development Plan targets.

29. The survey indicated that secondary schools were satisfied with the consultation about, and the clarity and relevance of, the Education Development Plan. Primary schools felt that the consultation procedures and the clarity of the plan were good and the arrangements for consultation satisfactory. Headteachers of schools visited also agreed with the priorities and the inclusion of the principles which were generally felt to be vitally important. Of the 29 schools visited, 16 reported that they judged the arrangements for drawing up the Education Development Plan to be good. Many of the schools visited or surveyed also appreciated not only the LEA's vision, but its commitment to working in partnership with them and their governing bodies. Those school representatives who were

members of the Management Partnership Group and had been involved in consultation were impressed by the way in which the LEA had responded to feedback and they reported that the Education Development Plan had been sharpened and simplified as a result of the process.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **LEA SUPPORT FOR RAISING STANDARDS**

#### **Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention**

30. The Education Development Plan, which is evaluated in paragraphs 23 to 29, sets out the LEA's strategy for raising standards in schools.

31. OFSTED inspections showed a significant number of schools in Hertfordshire to have weaknesses which led the LEA to believe it had insufficient knowledge of its schools. The new Director of Education, appointed just over two years ago, drove the imperative to create an LEA as a whole, and an advisory service in particular, which could assess the quality of its schools, diagnose the level of support needed, and provide advice and guidance to those schools in greatest need. As a result, services were reorganised. The School Standards and Curriculum Division has been created recently and it is building on the work of the advisory service, formerly Hertfordshire Education Services, which began to redress the imbalance in its work and take stock of its rationale and strategy for school improvement.

32. The School Standards and Curriculum Division's work is well-founded on meeting statutory duties, diagnostic monitoring of schools, early involvement and intervention in schools causing concern and measures to strengthen weak departments. The Division's work is closely aligned to the recommendations in the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations. It provides school-based advice, guidance and training. A school development adviser is attached to each school which is entitled to two-and-a-half days each year. This time is used well to monitor and review performance, discuss targets and provide feedback to the headteachers and governing bodies. Additional support or training can be purchased from the LEA or other providers.

33. Annual school reviews were implemented in primary schools last year, and have begun in all secondary schools this academic year. These diagnostic reviews inform the LEA about its schools, particularly those with which it lost contact during the period in which they were grant maintained: almost one-third of the LEA's secondary schools were previously grant maintained. The reviews result in written reports which identify strengths, weaknesses, progress and targets for improvement. These are monitored by the assistant director. The quality of the review reports has improved as the process has developed. The latest ones provide a clear picture of the school and its development priorities. These reports are an important ingredient in helping schools to improve.

34. The LEA knows the limits to its capacity to provide support across all curricular areas. Consequently it has created effective links with other providers, for example, through the Universities of Cambridge and Hertfordshire with whom the LEA is liaising and supporting a number of school-improvement activities.

35. The work of the School Standards and Curriculum Division was a theme in the 29 schools visited. Primary and special schools had received generally good levels of support. Secondary schools had been supported satisfactorily. The quality and impact of the school development advisers were, in most cases, appreciated by the schools and improving. There was some variability in the way in which individual advisers operated

and their impact on schools. Primary schools benefited more from the impact of the work of the school development advisers than secondary schools, due, in some degree, to a significant proportion of them having had very little contact with the LEA during the time they were grant maintained.

36. The survey revealed that schools are satisfied that the LEA now knows its schools, with its monitoring of their work, and its capacity to support if things go wrong. The LEA disseminates good practice satisfactorily to its primary schools, but less well to its secondary schools and has identified the need to develop this aspect of its work to further help schools.

37. The reorganised School Curriculum and Standards Division with its refocused priorities is having a positive effect on schools. They are receiving an appropriate level of support: those in greatest need are receiving the greatest input. Overall, primary schools are deriving greater benefits from the support they receive than secondary schools. There is a need to ensure that secondary schools now benefit from the support they are given. It will also be crucial to ensure that the steps taken to strengthen collaboration in post-16 education result in improvements in pupils' performance at GCE A Level. The level of challenge to some schools was occasionally insufficient. Additionally, a small number of the schools visited had not made best use of the guidance and support they had received to facilitate improvement. In these cases, the schools need to make a greater resolve to harness the support provided by the LEA in order to improve.

38. Other services are making good contributions to the way in which the LEA is bringing about school improvement. The LEA's strategies for monitoring, intervening and supporting schools are well constructed and appropriate. Information and communications technology, which is reported later, is the only area in which the LEA lacks the necessary skills to support its schools. In every other respect it not only has the capacity and expertise to support and challenge its schools, it has the vision, desire and capability to implement its plans for further development.

39. The centrally-retained budget is spent well. The priorities set are funded appropriately and sterling efforts are made to ensure that services are both effective and accountable. The LEA provides good value for money.

40. The LEA, through the School Funding Unit and Assessment Team, provides each school with a profile containing an excellent set of **performance and management data**. Training is provided for all headteachers in interpreting and using data and setting targets. The school development adviser discusses targets and target-setting arrangements with key staff and governors.

41. Schools rate highly the quality, range and accuracy of the data supplied and guidance in its interpretation. There was variability in schools' understanding of how data might be used to facilitate **target setting**, the target setting process and how target setting may be used as a tool for helping to raise standards. Most schools, in the sample visited, have a good understanding of the data and its use to enable them to set realistic yet challenging targets, sometimes for aspects of their work where they feel that target setting could be helpful, but for which there is no statutory requirement. In a few cases, there had been a lack of challenge by the school development adviser where the targets set had

been accepted without question, even when the schools themselves were expecting to have to justify or revise these. While most schools were using performance data and target setting well, a number of schools regarded target setting with less seriousness than it deserves. One noteworthy development, however, is where a group of special school headteachers with the support and encouragement of the LEA, is developing systems for using value-added measures to enable them to set more accurate and meaningful targets for their pupils.

42. **Support for literacy** is effective and standards in literacy are rising. The 1999 national tests show that Key Stage 2 attainment in English rose by six per cent, one per cent above the national average. Currently, 78 per cent of pupils attain Level 4 or above against the LEA's target of 88 per cent by 2002. The figures conceal major differences in the attainment of individual schools and the LEA is providing additional support for schools where significant numbers of pupils remain at a low level at the end of Key Stage 2 and where there are significant differences in attainment related to ethnicity and gender.

43. Hertfordshire implemented effectively its own literacy project in a number of primary schools during 1997-8. Practitioners from this pilot scheme contributed helpfully to the initial National Literacy Strategy training. One pilot school attributed its consequent 12 per cent rise in standards to its participation, but in one of the five schools visited by HMI to observe literacy lessons, initial gains have not been sustained and the school is not receiving the intensive support it needs. Schools are confident that support is available through a help-line and through training but more would be welcomed. The two literacy support groups are valued by schools and provide a forum for sharing good practice, discussing and resolving difficulties and keeping up to date with initiatives. The LEA is now implementing its plan to provide a network of literacy groups across the County in order to disseminate good practice and provide an efficient and effective support mechanism.

44. The large majority of schools receive appropriate light touch support. The school development advisers' monitoring and guidance in "light touch" schools is crucial to their continuing achievement. The advisers work closely with the literacy team. The guidance and support provided by advisers varied in quality in the 19 schools visited for literacy purposes although most is at least satisfactory. Advisers have given good help in setting targets but their monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning during the literacy hour itself are not consistently useful.

45. In 1998-9 the LEA provided intensive support to 45 low achieving schools with medium intensive support to a further 50. Of the schools receiving intensive support, 14 improved sufficiently to be moved into the medium support group with one or two moving out of both these cohorts. The intensive support is good: it was very effective in the two schools visited for this purpose. Most schools raised pupils' attainment but in 14 of the intensive schools, test results for 1999 fell, with five schools experiencing a fall of 10 per cent or more. The LEA attributes some of these falls to cohort size. However, the LEA has not compared the strategies used in these schools with those used in others which have improved significantly. This needs to be done if the LEA is to learn from its experience with low achieving schools in order to inform how it can best support literacy developments.

46. Most schools valued literacy training and viewed the National Literacy Strategy positively. The extra training given to staff in special schools and education support centres has not met their needs entirely and they needed more specialist support. They currently get the most useful help through the Special Schools Subject support groups. The LEA has helped special schools to make encouraging progress in analysing data on progress in literacy, using the descriptors for performance indicators published nationally.

47. The literacy consultants are successfully involved in a range of initiatives to improve literacy. Summer schools have been successful. Helpful written guidance has been provided for schools in relation to work in literacy with Traveller children and work with children with English as an additional language. The Key Stage 3 Literacy project has enabled teachers to improve their teaching strategies. The recent Key Stage 3 literacy training was well attended.

48. The LEA's Literacy Action Plan is comprehensive and reflects national thrusts in developing literacy. Although information has been shared through the Education Development Plan, the Plan itself lacks information about monitoring and evaluating the progress of priority activities and is not shared with schools. Schools feel that they are not sufficiently informed about proposed LEA initiatives.

49. The support for literacy is well planned. It is staffed adequately but it is unlikely that the current small team will be able to meet effectively all the increasing demands for additional training and support. The literacy team is efficiently managed and is appropriately linked to the advisory and other services. The provision made by the LEA contributes successfully in improving standards.

50. The LEA provides effective **support for numeracy**. Improving standards in numeracy is given a high priority within the Education Development Plan. For the LEA as a whole, the National Curriculum mathematics test results are better than the national averages but there remain wide variations between schools. Provisional 1999 Key Stage 2 results show an increase of 11 per cent which is one per cent more than the national average increase. The overall achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 now stands at 75 per cent of pupils at Level 4 or above, against the target of 81 per cent by 2002.

51. The LEA's efforts to improve numeracy centre on the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy. The numeracy action plan is clear and concise and includes a comprehensive set of intentions, which encompass appropriate activities across all phases. Prominent attention is given to providing support and training for teachers and classroom assistants and to specific development needs such as raising standards of ethnic minority groups and improving family numeracy. It is too early in the implementation of the plan to judge the impact and success of many of the initiatives.

52. In 1998 the LEA ran a pilot numeracy project involving a small group of schools judged to be in need of intensive support. Dissemination of the findings from the project through focused training conferences helped many primary schools to make an early start in introducing the dedicated mathematics lesson and to improving the focus on mental and oral work.

53. During the summer terms of 1998 and 1999 the LEA supported a series of summer schools for pupils who attained Level 3 or below in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2. Appropriate focus was placed on areas of weakness as identified through an analysis of the test results. The summer schools were, overall, successful in developing pupils' confidence in mathematics.

54. Numeracy was a focus of visits in 20 schools. Training for the National Numeracy Strategy is regarded by the schools visited to have been effective; primary schools are positive and confident about the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy. Secondary schools welcome the guidance given by the LEA on creating a policy for numeracy across the curriculum.

55. In schools where the LEA has concentrated its efforts, largely those judged in need of intensive support, there is clear evidence of school development advisers working closely with the mathematics advisory team, and standards have risen substantially. Good support has been given to help schools monitor and evaluate their progress. For example, in one school, LEA staff observed teachers and helped individuals set themselves targets for improvement which are to be the focus for observations by the senior management team. In another school the mathematics adviser and mathematics subject leader observed staff jointly, which helped to formulate subsequent action for the whole school.

56. Improvement in schools other than those identified as needing intensive support is more variable but on the whole the picture shows that some good standards are being sustained. The LEA has started to build up and organise clusters and other local networks of schools and, where there is a need, to encourage new ones with a view to creating opportunities for sharing good practice.

57. Information about the support available for the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy had not been received by schools at the time of the inspection. The mathematics consultants have established good working relationships with their intensive support schools but have not yet had opportunities to establish contacts much wider than this because of the newness of the strategy.

58. Managing **information and communications technologies** in order to improve educational standards and quality is rightly a priority of the Education Development Plan. OFSTED reports indicate that pupils' attainment and progress in ICT are in need of improvement and the use and quality of ICT in the curriculum are weak. The majority of schools, particularly primary, are working at a low level and require support to develop the necessary expertise to enable them to move forward.

59. High levels of delegation, without appropriate ICT guidance have resulted in schools developing and using a wide range of different systems across the LEA. Details of New Opportunities Funding for staff development, linked to schools' ICT plans, have been circulated to schools, but insufficient information on approved providers has been given. School visits confirmed that in all six of the primary schools and five of the seven secondary schools where ICT was a theme, support was unsatisfactory. Comprehensive details of hardware resources and staff expertise are unavailable: there are indications that resource levels are low. LEA support for ICT is weak.



60. The LEA, after consultation with schools through the Partnership Groups, decided to use National Grid for Learning funds to provide an ICT infrastructure. The plan for the development of this work provides clear information on what is to be achieved each year in order that a comprehensive service will be available to all schools at the end of the four-year programme. The LEA currently lacks an adviser for ICT and, as a result, is unable to support its schools effectively: only 20 per cent of schools have been able to develop successfully the use of ICT to support the curriculum.

61. The number of schools which have, in the past, been formally identified as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses has been regarded by the LEA as unacceptably high. The number of **schools causing concern** has reduced as a result of well-targeted LEA support. There are currently five primary schools and one secondary school requiring special measures and, since September 1998, three primary schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses. Since the identification of the first schools to require special measures many improvements have taken place. The new leadership of the Education Department and its refocused work has had a positive impact on reducing the number of weak schools. The excellent strategies for identifying schools with weaknesses bring together the work of a number of the sections of the LEA. Identified schools are supported by a core project group responsible for implementing agreed procedures and monitoring and evaluating progress. Several schools identified as requiring special measures made such significant improvements that they remained in this category for a relatively short period of time.

62. Those schools with weaknesses which were surveyed regarded highly the support provided by the LEA. The schools are improving, and demanding targets have been set for further improvement. The case study documentation on weak schools indicates very strong support, accurate and helpful feedback to the school, and the setting of clear, challenging targets. The LEA has been instrumental in establishing an effective regional support group for headteachers of schools with weaknesses and has also set up a joint project with the University of Cambridge which is supporting headteachers of a number of schools in a learning partnership. These praiseworthy initiatives are appreciated by those involved, and are helping schools to develop expertise while disseminating and sharing good practice.

63. The LEA provides good **support for early years**. Since 1997, Hertfordshire has offered three terms of pre-school education for nearly all four year olds. The first Hertfordshire Early Years Development Plan, agreed by the DfEE earlier this year, is a good plan which sets out a number of appropriate targets for developing education, care and integrated support services through partnership with all recognised providers. The LEA is making strenuous efforts, with a high degree of success, to target resources effectively, to develop pre-school provision in line with county policy and to maintain and improve co-operative arrangements between public, private and voluntary sectors.

64. OFSTED reports indicate that the quality of nursery education in Hertfordshire is good and forms a secure base upon which to develop provision. The needs of schools with young children are identified through the LEA's consultative structure and the findings have resulted in establishing a number of pilot schemes. The LEA has reviewed these and has implemented a programme of accreditation using the Hertfordshire Quality Standard to improve further the quality of early years provision. Plans are developing for a

training programme for early years workers to focus on literacy and numeracy and provide staff with the opportunity of gaining additional qualifications, and to devise a strategy to promote continuity and progression of learning experiences. Information provided for parents on early years provision is clear and informative.

65. The LEA and the Early Childhood Unit, which has responsibility for developments in early years, work effectively to improve and extend provision for young children and their families. There are very effective partnership working arrangements through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership which works cross-departmentally and with other public and private sector organisations. A bid for an Early Excellence Centre, based on a child development centre and an existing nursery school, has been successful and will open in September 2000. It will provide education, health services and out-of-school care, support for a childminding network, early years staff training, family learning, community facilities and a children's information centre. This innovative project is a result of effective liaison between the West Hertfordshire Community Health Service Trust and Hertfordshire County Council.

66. The LEA has identified a need for improvement in **support for management and leadership**; school development planning; support for new headteachers, and securing an effective appraisal system. It plans to:- develop further school profiles, producing a framework for self evaluation; provide training and support for staff with accountability for monitoring and evaluation; support schools in gaining Investors in People status; and develop networks to support benchmarking.

67. The overall strategy for management development and support is satisfactory and improving. There have been significant training opportunities for headteachers and senior managers although these have not represented a coherent strategy for training for middle and senior managers. The LEA has promoted opportunities for training offered by outside providers, but the quality of its own provision has been variable. Headteacher appraisal has been sporadic, the LEA appraising only 16 per cent of headteachers last year. The support for, and induction of, newly appointed headteachers was effective in six of the eight schools where this was relevant. Support and involvement by the LEA in the preparation and implementation of school development plans and post-inspection action plans are provided on a traded basis.

68. The quality of **teaching** in primary schools, which was judged in OFSTED inspection reports to be satisfactory or better, is in line with that of the LEA's statistical neighbours and national averages. However, the proportions of lessons judged to be satisfactory or better across Key Stages 3 and 4 were lower than the national averages. There is, therefore, a need to improve teaching generally, but more specifically to improve that in Key Stages 3 and 4: a matter which the LEA has recognised and is tackling.

69. The LEA support for teaching is effective. The LEA puts on an adequate range of courses to support teaching across the curriculum and has worked collaboratively with a number of external partners to provide in-service training opportunities. One good example is the work being done with the University of Cambridge to create a learning partnership which is focused on raising the quality of teaching in under-performing secondary schools. However, too many of the LEA courses were cancelled at short

notice. Improved support for newly qualified teachers has been introduced in line with the new requirements.

70. Primary schools receive satisfactory support for subject leaders and for specific aspects of the curriculum, for example, literacy, numeracy, music and religious education. However, the support for curricular planning, improving teaching methods and classroom management, while satisfactory in primary schools was unsatisfactory in secondary schools.

71. The schools visited are improving. Twenty-four of the schools were receiving sufficient, effective support. Particularly effective support had been given in literacy, numeracy, assessment, and in helping those teachers who work with pupils for whom English is an additional language. In the remaining five schools the support was insufficient to meet the schools' needs either because it had not been clearly enough focused on specific needs, or because schools had not sought LEA support. While the courses attended were felt to have been beneficial, there was wide variation in their quality. The LEA now needs to find ways of challenging its schools to improve further.

72. **Support and training for school governors** are very good. The quality of support, communications, consultation and provision of information and training was rated as good or very good in 22 of the 26 schools where this was a theme of the visit. Support for governor recruitment, including the appointment of LEA nominated governors, is effective, although nine out of 19 schools visited, where support for governors was a theme, had experienced some difficulty or delay in filling LEA vacancies; at the time of the inspection, around 10 per cent of LEA governor posts were vacant. In some cases schools submitted their own nominations to the political parties which were accepted.

## **Recommendations:**

- (1) In order to improve support for raising pupils' achievements:-
  - continue to improve training and quality control procedures to ensure that school development advisers consistently provide good support for schools and present them with greater challenge (paras 35 and 37);
  - an audit of training needs should be carried out in order to inform the programme of training and support (paras 67 and 69);
  - the strategy for supporting the professional development of headteachers and senior managers should be clarified and formalised (para 67).
  
- (2) In order to improve support for literacy:-
  - provide more effective support to low-achieving schools by evaluating the effectiveness of strategies which have been deployed and adjusting consultants' work according to the findings (para 45).
  
- (3) In order to improve support for numeracy:-
  - ensure that all schools are aware of the structures and systems available to develop numeracy and of their entitlement to the ongoing support of consultants (para 57).
  
- (4) In order to improve support for ICT:-
  - ensure that schools have access to the advice and guidance they need in order to improve teaching quality and pupils' attainment (paras 58, 59 and 60).

## **SECTION THREE**

### **STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

#### **Corporate Planning**

73. Good quality corporate planning and working are strengths of the LEA. Improvements in standards of attainment and the quality of education are high on the corporate agenda of the Council. Current initiatives to improve services across the Council and in the education service in particular are firmly led. Education's contribution to the corporate agenda is defined in "The County Agenda - Services Today and Tomorrow". Its role is "boosting achievements for all through supporting schools across the County and working with young people both in and out of school". The County reflects this in its budget allocation, with education spending being maintained at or just above Standard Spending Assessment for a number of years. The Education Development Plan translates this objective into detailed planning to support school improvement.

74. The County Council has embarked on a number of initiatives under the generic title "Herts Connect", designed to improve the accessibility of services by the public and the efficiency of service delivery. This is expected to become a vehicle for delivering services through a corporate strategy. Work is under way in a number of education services, but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these developments, although there is a strong commitment to ensuring success by the Director of Education. Corporate performance is monitored by a representative "Citizens' Panel" and the LEA has contracted Roehampton Institute to conduct a survey of views about the quality and effectiveness of its services. There is, as yet, no report from the Institute. The LEA is well placed to implement recommendations arising from the survey and the inspection in order to create an even more efficient and effective service.

75. Strategic leadership of the LEA is effective and members are well informed and advised by their officers.

76. The LEA has developed very good relations with other agencies. It has developed an effective style of partnership working which involves regular consultation and briefing, use of questionnaires to canvass opinions, inter-agency panels, focus groups and working parties. Strong links have been established with the Social Services Department and there are many good examples of joint working and inter-agency projects. Liaison is good at all levels. For example, the LEA liaises closely with Social Services through its Joint Board where the Director of Education and Director of Social Services meet regularly to discuss operational and developmental issues, and at local level there is close liaison on the area panels which meet to discuss issues related to individual children. The Health Service works closely with education at county and local level. Health services and education, together with other agencies are closely involved in a community-parenting project which, if successful, will be extended. Health promotion advisers and LEA advisers regularly co-train and collaborate to produce good guidance for schools in the form of useful reference documents. Education and health have worked successfully to improve the Hospital and Home Education Service. Liaison is effective in the joint provision of

funding by Health, Education and Social Services for project work and for the placements of children with special educational needs.

77. The LEA works well with the police and there are strong inter-agency strategies and work in relation to drugs education, with attractive and useful guidance provided for teachers and parents. The LEA is an active member of the inter-agency Drug Action Team. Representatives from schools and police meet regularly to plan and co-ordinate co-operative working. Good quality curricular materials are made available to teachers to support crime prevention education. Police officers contribute to teacher training and advisers contribute to police training. Links with the Careers Service are strengthened by the Work-related Partnership Consultative group. The Training and Enterprise Council is closely involved with the LEA in a number of successful projects. Very good working relationships have been established with the Diocese of St Albans and Diocese of Westminster and both are well-informed of the work of the LEA and are included in decision-making. Relationships with the community are very good. Parents indicate that they are able to influence policies. Mori polls in 1997 show that 85 per cent of adults interviewed were satisfied with primary schools and only eight per cent were dissatisfied, a great improvement on the 1991 poll and one of the best ratings recorded by Mori. The poll shows a similar picture for secondary schools.

78. The LEA has comprehensive and detailed arrangements for consultation, intended to give schools an important part in contributing to the LEA's strategy. Arrangements have been reviewed in the light of the requirements of the 1998 Act, 'Modernising Local Government', and the perceived need to increase the representation of parents and other partners and to promote more collaborative working with other agencies and council departments. Major partnership groups include the Hertfordshire Education Management Partnership, which brings together education, management partnership groups for each division of the Department, representative groups of secondary, primary and special school headteachers and governors. The effectiveness of these partnerships is variable. Local Education Forums, with representation of headteachers, chairs of governing bodies, local members and further education are used for dissemination and dialogue, are ineffective and poorly attended. A variety of methods of consultation is in use, including:- written consultation documents; briefing and consultation meetings; questionnaires; focus groups; and working parties.

79. The survey indicates that headteachers are broadly content with the level of consultation and feel that they have an influence on the LEA's policies, although secondary schools were considerably less satisfied than primaries. In general, partnership groups felt more involved and were more positive about consultation arrangements, although communications between representatives on partnership groups and other headteachers are less effective than they should be.

## **School Infrastructure**

80. Schools have built up their own approach to the use of ICT to support management.

The Financial Services to Schools Unit provides software support for two main financial packages used by schools. The Schools Information Technology Systems Support Unit offers ICT training and support which are available to schools on a subscription basis. The unit also has responsibility for achieving some of the targets set out in the Education Development Plan, including the establishment of an electronic system for the exchange of data between schools and County Hall. In addition, a Management Information Unit is planned but the head of the unit has yet to be recruited.

81. Hertfordshire received an allocation of funding for the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). After consulting with partnership groups, it was agreed to use the 1998-99 allocation to connect all Hertfordshire schools to the NGfL. This would enable them to have filtered access to the Internet through the Hertfordshire Intranet. The installation of Stage 1 is complete. Hertfordshire has developed a website on which schools can access curricular, management and software information. The most recent item of financial software to enable schools to make three-year budget projections was made available to schools through placing it on this website. The Schools Information Technology Systems Support Unit has provided training to school staff and supported schools with the purchase and installation of computer networks. Schools report that this work has been good.

82. The Hertfordshire grid is intended to provide a reliable system for electronic communication in schools across Hertfordshire. At the time of the inspection this was not fully in place. Aspects of support provided by the LEA have been helpful to individual schools. However, following the installation of ISDN lines in every school, there is still a great deal to do to make effective use of ICT for the management of the LEA and its schools.

83. The survey shows that schools rated the work of the LEA on development and implementation of an information technology strategy, introduction of NGfL, advice on hardware and software as unsatisfactory, and electronic information exchange between the LEA and schools as poor. During visits, schools mentioned the lack of consultation over the NGfL installations, several of them having problems in making the connection work, in getting access to e-mail and making links between the Internet connection and the rest of the schools' computer network.

84. The County has a history of high levels of delegation for repairs and maintenance of school buildings. This has made it difficult for the LEA to monitor how effectively funds are being used to meet structural priority needs. An assessment of maintenance backlog was done in 1996 and estimated to cost £28 million. For the past four years, the LEA has budgeted approximately £5.5m per year for school repairs and maintenance in the central budget, with approximately £5m per year delegated to schools. This delegated amount increased to £6.9m for 1999-2000, while the central budget remains steady. Of the central expenditure, appropriately 80 per cent is spent on planned maintenance work. Once the Asset Management Plan is completed, the LEA will be in a position to inform schools when capital work is realistically likely to be undertaken.

85. The LEA has a sound approach to planning and managing centrally managed expenditure, and is making good progress towards completing its Asset Management Plan based upon a condition survey undertaken in the summer of 1999. The survey shows that schools give the LEA's contractor a less than satisfactory rating for most aspects of building management and maintenance advice. This has been a concern of the LEA. However, further work will need to be done to ensure an effective service. During the school visits, three schools had received good service in support of building work. However, ten schools had experienced problems with delays and the overall approach of the private company contracted to provide building surveyor services.

86. The Education Personnel Unit provides a valued service to both schools and the Department. The service to schools is provided on a traded basis, and that for the Department through a service level agreement. The traded subscription entitles schools to guidance manuals, telephone and personal support. The unit also provides a contract writing service. The survey shows the personnel service to be very well regarded; policy and procedures for the employment of staff being rated good by both primary and secondary schools. During school visits, all schools that discussed this matter spoke of how helpful and supportive the unit had been, often with tricky employment matters. The unit has helped schools with both routine personnel matters and provided effective support in dealing with difficult and sensitive issues. As part of the Education Development Plan, the unit is developing a project to support the recruitment of teachers and a 'Keeping in Touch' scheme for former teachers who are not currently working in the profession.

#### **Recommendations:**

- (5) In order to improve communications and to enable effective use of ICT for school administration, a realistic, costed, comprehensive strategy for ICT development should be devised and implemented (paras 80-83).
- (6) In order to improve the quality of building maintenance, advice and services to schools, more effective monitoring of the contract with the private contractor should be carried out to ensure that schools receive a quality service (para 85).



## **SECTION FOUR**

### **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

87. LEA support for special educational provision is good. Hertfordshire is succeeding in fulfilling almost all of its statutory responsibilities for pupils with special educational needs. The LEA successfully provides a well organised range of advisory support services and special educational needs provision in mainstream and special school settings. The school visits show individual pupils and teachers are given effective, and often good, support. Well organised area and county teams of specialist advisers, teachers and officers provide advice, assessment and direct teaching support for pupils. In over half of the 29 schools visited, support from educational psychologists was good and in almost all of the schools the support was at least satisfactory. In three schools the high turnover of education psychologists disrupted the support and was unsettling for some pupils and parents.

88. The emphasis on the early identification of special needs has resulted in a significant rise in the support given to pre-school and young school-aged children. Teachers of young children have found that the use of baseline assessment has made them more adept in identifying pupils in need of extra help and that the LEA has been prompt in providing the extra resources needed.

89. The LEA provides an appropriate range of advisory services to support children with special needs in mainstream schools. It has also developed systems to provide schools with delegated funds to meet these needs. The funding systems devised following the adoption of the strategy in October 1996 are currently undergoing revision. A consultation document, which has proposals to remedy some of the difficulties with the system, was issued in May 1999 and has been adopted.

90. The number of pupils referred for statutory statements has fallen by 34 per cent compared with last year, and 12.7 per cent fewer statements have been issued. The proportion of children with statements at 1.3 per cent is now close to the national average. The LEA has improved the time scale for issuing statements and currently almost 82 per cent are issued within eighteen weeks. The new data base provides very good support for officers and is helping them to improve their services to schools. Through training and advice, the LEA has helped schools to draw up individual education plans of good quality. The LEA alerts schools and gives useful guidance about impending Annual Reviews so that schools can ensure that relevant information is available from different agencies. The LEA is represented at about one in three Annual Reviews and the support satisfies schools. Special needs co-ordinators and other SEN staff have opportunities to take part in regular LEA training and more advanced training with Cambridge University. Local support groups are valued by staff in the primary and special schools but secondary teachers are not all aware of these opportunities or choose not to take advantage of them.

91. The LEA is gradually moving towards providing more inclusive education. A number of specialist centres and several special schools provide outreach support for pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. The outreach work of the ten primary bases for specific learning difficulties includes training and support for teachers and is highly valued. Additional outreach training of selected teachers in special schools is being

provided so that mainstream schools can be supported in retaining pupils with more complex special needs. The LEA has very recently set up an Inclusion Task Group. Despite reassurances from the LEA, special and mainstream schools are uneasy about their future roles. What is missing is a clear statement of the LEA's intentions for inclusion and greater coherence in provision for inclusion.

92. The LEA has successfully established good working relations with stakeholders. The Parent Partnership co-ordinator successfully helps parents to understand the system through advice and workshops and is helping to reduce the number of appeals to the SEN tribunal from a high level in 1997-8 to a level in 1998-9 which is similar to the LEA's statistical neighbours. Inter-agency work with Health, Social Services the voluntary and other sectors is good. These partners work closely together in deciding placements for children. Out-County placements, jointly funded, have recently been reduced from 267 pupils to 226 through further development of local provision, for example, for autism and dyslexia. The Education Development Plan target of out-County placements for 2002 has already been exceeded. Capacity at special schools has reduced slightly, mainly in response to demographic change.

93. Strategies, with the exception of that for inclusion, are clear. The LEA has consulted widely, reviewed needs and responded to statutory requirements. Activities to initiate improvement are clearly defined and staff responsibilities suitably identified. Action plans are comprehensive, focused, with relevant time scales, success criteria and are appropriately costed. The LEA has a clear focus on priorities and targets and is successful in its involvement with other agencies. It meets the needs of users, contributes to raising standards and is concerned for the welfare of pupils.

94. In 1995-6, Hertfordshire identified the need to improve the management and control of resources devoted to meeting special educational needs. In October 1996 a revised special educational needs strategy was introduced which emphasises the role of mainstream schools in providing for the needs of most children. This approach is having a significant impact on improving budgetary control and promoting social inclusion, consistent with the Government's plans. The LEA also introduced improved admissions criteria for special schools, threshold criteria for assessments and targets to reduce the number of out-county placements.

95. New proposals, to operate from the start of the 2000-1 financial year, address the criticism of schools that the previous system of enhanced funding (audit 4) was cumbersome and bureaucratic. In future, schools will receive delegated funding based on the assessed need. Schools will be able to use this funding flexibly to meet the full range of pupil needs at Stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice.

96. As the strategy of inclusion progresses, so the complexity of need catered for in special schools will rise. Control of the special educational needs budget has improved. Value for money is satisfactory and is improving. In 1996-97 there was an over-spend of £1.432m on education of pupils with statements. In 1997-98 this fell to £0.416m and is anticipated to be close to zero for 1998-9.

**Recommendation:**

- (7) In order to improve the service, the policy and strategy for inclusion need to be more clearly defined and effectively coordinated (paras 91 and 93).

## **SECTION FIVE**

### **ACCESS**

#### **The supply of school places**

97. The LEA satisfactorily manages the supply of school places. The issue of surplus places has been reviewed by District Audit twice, once in 1996-97 and again in 1998-99. The second District Audit review noted a significant reduction in unfilled places in primary schools from 14 per cent to 10 per cent between the two studies, and a reduction in the number of schools with more than 25 per cent of unfilled places from 22 per cent to 15 per cent. The overall proportion of unfilled secondary school places had been reduced from 16 per cent to 13 per cent. The LEA has reduced surplus places in both primary and secondary schools. Currently there is a six per cent surplus of places in primary schools and eight per cent in secondary schools. These surplus places are unevenly spread. Twenty secondary schools, of which 13 are foundation or voluntary aided, have rolls which are more than five per cent in excess of capacity, whereas 14 schools have more than 25 per cent unfilled places.

98. A significant number of schools in the south of the County select pupils partially by ability. There is considerable opportunity for parents to exercise choice within a small geographical area, leaving some schools over-subscribed and others with surplus capacity.

99. The School Organisation Plan has been agreed. The School Organisation Plan acknowledges that previous policies led to the creation of relatively small secondary schools. All secondary schools in the County, bar one, have a sixth form. The percentage of small sixth forms, according to the Audit Commission definition, reduced from 69 per cent in 1996-97 to 52 per cent in 1998-99. However, the District Auditor in August 1999, while noting progress over the past two years in reducing the number of surplus places, recommended that the LEA should give more attention to the issue of small sixth forms. The LEA has agreed a strategy with schools and the four further education colleges in the County to strengthen current sixth form collaborative arrangements through ensuring that local consortia have targets as well as joint responsibility for making adequate provision for post-16 students in their area. Schools acknowledge that there is an issue to be addressed, that the LEA has a duty to make best use of the available resources and to ensure that a broad, high quality curriculum is accessible to all students. The LEA will monitor and evaluate these developments to ensure that the intended benefits are secured.

100. Hertfordshire has undertaken reorganisations in secondary provision in Watford, Welwyn Garden City and Borehamwood; the last of these being the most complex and the most recent. The new arrangements have yet to bed down. A successful outcome of these changes will allow the LEA, through the School Organisation Committee, to develop the confidence to be pro-active in undertaking the proposed area-focused reviews, where surplus places exist or are forecast.

## **Admissions to primary schools**

101. For September 1996 the County agreed a policy that all four-year olds should have access to pre-school education. A procedure was adopted whereby children applied for a school place two years ahead of their admission date. Once their primary school place was identified, they were then allocated a nursery education place which would lead into that primary school. A two-stage process is proposed for children who start primary school in September 2001 onwards. Separate applications will now be made for places in nursery and primary education. This improved scheme should clarify the situation for parents and make planning more straightforward for schools.

102. Most of the difficulties arising from primary admissions are a consequence of population movements. The LEA produces good quality information to parents and has undertaken research in partnership with National Foundation for Educational Research among parents to elicit feedback on the quality of the service provided. Overall 90.6 per cent of parents were satisfied with the service. Extensive consultation has taken place about the proposed changes to the primary admissions arrangements.

103. The survey shows primary schools are satisfied with the quality of information on admissions and with the handling of appeals. During school visits, seven, out of nine primary schools, which will be affected directly by the changes, supported the proposed changes to the primary admission arrangements.

104. The LEA is meeting statutory requirements and the proposed changes to primary school admission arrangements should be helpful both to parents and schools. Two hundred appeals were heard relating to September 2000, of which 17.5 per cent were upheld, compared with 329 (44.4 per cent) in 1997 and 504 (37 per cent) for 1998.

## **Admissions to secondary schools**

105. Hertfordshire has recently taken effective steps, in partnership with schools, to co-ordinate the process of secondary transfer. This has led to a higher proportion of children receiving an offer from one of their chosen schools and a reduction in admission appeals. The LEA has had a difficult time with admissions to secondary schools, particularly in the south of the County, where a high proportion of secondary schools opted for grant maintained status, partly so that they could set their own admissions criteria. Several of the popular schools admit a proportion of their intake on the basis of ability. For September 1999 admissions, the LEA took on a co-ordinating role, which has improved the situation considerably with the potential for further improvement in future years. The recent decision by the Schools Adjudicator upholding many of the objections made by the LEA to admissions criteria for foundation schools in Hertfordshire should make it easier for local children to secure a place in their preferred schools.

106. The LEA asked the Secretary of State to impose a co-ordinated scheme for September 1999 secondary admissions. This new system is a considerable improvement: every child was offered a school place by 24 February and 94.8 per cent in one of their chosen schools. This varies from 98 per cent in North Hertfordshire to 83 per cent in the south of the County. In the previous year there were up to 1000 children in the south-west of the County without a place at the end of February. In the current year,

however, there are still 118 children not attending the school they were allocated: of these 75 are in the south west of the County.

107. In the survey, secondary schools indicated that information and appeals processes were less than satisfactory. However, the school visits indicated that the 1999 admissions process was an improvement on the previous situation and schools were optimistic about further improvement into the future. Some primary schools mentioned the impact that the secondary transfer process has on them.

108. In those parts of the County that lie on the border between those areas that have middle schools and those that transfer at age 11, junior schools lose a proportion of children at the end of Year 4, which makes planning provision for the last two years of Key Stage 2 difficult.

### **Provision of education otherwise than at school**

109. Children who have no school place or are non-attenders are able to access education through the LEA's eight education support centres which they attend for ten hours per week while awaiting school placement. Those disaffected in Year 11 whose needs cannot be met in mainstream school are offered youth programme schemes aimed at increasing self confidence, providing pastoral support, and supporting the transition to further education colleges, employment or other training opportunities. Children of all ages are accommodated in the centres and receive appropriate programmes relating to their ages and needs. Children Out of School Groups are area based and are effective in bringing together the relevant agencies in providing for pupils' needs in monitoring their progress.

### **Support for attendance**

110. The LEA provides good support, and where necessary alternative strategies, to enable and encourage children to attend school.

111. Attendance in the LEA is good, well above the national average in primary and above average in secondary schools. Sixteen schools with less than 90 per cent attendance have been targeted appropriately for improvement. Strategies in use include attendance project workers, social inclusion workers and additional education welfare officer time. The work of the education welfare officer is very effective: registers are rigorously checked and absences followed up by home visits and meetings with parents. Education welfare officer time is allocated according to a formula related to need which ensures that it is appropriately targeted. This service is valued consistently and considered to be good by 19 of the 29 schools.

112. Collaborative arrangements between schools have been successful in some areas in enabling children at risk of exclusion to be admitted to another school to continue in education. A good feature, for pupils whose poor attendance patterns or behaviour are of concern or who are considered to be 'at risk', is the support provided by outreach work from the education support centres. Schools have found this to be very effective in enabling children to remain in mainstream. Children who have been excluded or are poor

attenders are also supported by the education support centres in reintegration. The LEA has been active in the early identification of children with problems.

113. Targets have been set for reintegrating children who are out of school due to ill-health, pregnancy, because they are carers, known to social services, reported for criminal offending or looked after by the local authority. Traveller children are identified and their attendance at school encouraged and monitored. The LEA keeps comprehensive data on its pupils and is successful in reducing the number of children out of school.

114. The LEA is making good attempts to encourage social inclusion through curricular and pastoral development. School inclusion workers have been appointed in four secondary schools which have high number of pupils from groups at risk of disaffection. The extension of school-based activities designed to engage both parents and pupils including homework clubs, summer schools, help with key skills and sports are part of a bid for funding which will support social inclusion in areas of particular need within the LEA.

### **Support for behaviour**

115. According to the findings of OFSTED reports, pupils' attitudes and behaviour in the LEA's schools are in line with the national averages. The LEA supports satisfactorily improvement in behaviour. The eight education support centres, an adviser for emotional and behavioural difficulties and advisory teachers provide support for individual pupils across the County. Although in most of the schools visited, support for managing behaviour was obtained easily, four schools considered they had received inappropriate or insufficient support. The LEA intervenes successfully with support for individual pupils in a crisis situation. It has recognised the need to support pupils with behavioural difficulties and has identified this as a priority in the Education Development Plan. Policies are in place and procedures are known to schools. Although the various agencies work together appropriately to provide support, their work is not always sufficiently well co-ordinated. Outreach workers have been successful in enabling pupils to continue in mainstream schools, and in some areas, collaborative arrangements between schools enable pupils to move schools as an alternative to exclusion.

116. The LEA has drawn up a good Behaviour Support Plan which is based on its sound knowledge of a comprehensive system already in existence. The Plan is beginning to be implemented appropriately. It makes clear that the responsibility for developing effective policies and the promotion of good behaviour lies firmly with schools, but identifies where support systems need to be developed in order to support schools more rigorously. The document has been circulated to schools, discussions with headteachers have been held and training opportunities offered to key members of staff. Despite consultation by the LEA, schools are largely unaware of the contents of the Behaviour Support Plan and the few staff familiar with it are unsure about the criteria to be used in relation to the four stages of need.

117. The proportion of pupils excluded from primary schools has been above the national average while the proportion of pupils excluded from secondary schools is slightly below average. However, primary exclusions have reduced slightly over the last year bringing them in line with the national average as a result of the LEA's focused work. At

Key Stage 4 a programme of alternative provision is in place for those students who are excluded or at risk of non-attendance. Disaffection at this stage is borne out by figures showing an increase in non-attendance during the summer, but attention to this aspect has led to a reduction this year of ten per cent on last year's figures.

### **Support for ethnic minority pupils**

118. The LEA provide good support for ethnic minority pupils and monitors closely their performance and progress. Around seven and a half per cent of all pupils in Hertfordshire are of minority ethnic heritage, although only a small number of schools have a significant minority ethnic pupil population. The largest group is of Indian origin. There are 7,010 pupils for whom English is an additional language.

119. The County has been collecting end of Key Stage 1 and 2 results by ethnicity for three years. The level of achievement by ethnic groups replicates the national picture, showing underachievement by Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African Caribbean pupils; other ethnic minority groups achieve broadly in line with white pupils. The 1998 results for African Caribbean pupils at Key Stage 2 were better than the trend across previous years, though at GCSE still below the County average, although the data should be interpreted with caution because numbers are small. In 1998, the County collected GCSE results by ethnicity for the first time; these results mirror national data and demonstrate the increasing differential between ethnic groups as pupils' progress through school.

120. The LEA has monitored, since 1992, the developing competence in English and the progress of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The Education Development Plan includes targets for the percentage of identified minority ethnic groups achieving L4+ at Key Stage 2 English and mathematics, and for the same groups achieving 5+ A\*-C grades and 1+ A\*-G grades in GCSE. The targets aim to reduce the differential levels of achievement of pupils for whom English is an additional language, and the authority plans to use Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant funding to support schools in meeting the targets, using suitably qualified, experienced teachers and bilingual classroom assistants, in-service training, support in data analysis, family literacy initiatives and advice and support to schools.

121. Permanent exclusion rates are high amongst African Caribbean pupils. In 1997-8 at 5.6 per cent of all permanent exclusions, 10.8 per cent of primary permanent exclusions and 4.5 per cent of secondary permanent exclusions were of African Caribbean pupils; the corresponding figures for fixed term exclusions were two per cent and three per cent respectively. There is considerable over-representation of this group in the exclusion statistics. The target for 2001-2 is to reduce African Caribbean permanent exclusions to three (1.8 per cent). Additional support for African Caribbean pupils at risk of exclusion is planned under Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant funding, together with collaborative work with educational support centres and the Education Welfare Service; support and advice to community based initiatives, for example, supplementary schools, further development of mentoring initiatives, and support in developing pastoral procedures and classroom support. The African Caribbean project aims to reduce the disproportionate level of permanent exclusion of African Caribbean pupils by providing direct in-class support to identified pupils; in the one school visited which had been involved in the project, there was already some evidence of success in achieving this objective. Only 0.6 per cent of



teachers in the LEA are from ethnic minority communities. The Education Development Plan sets a target for 2002 of raising this to 3.3 per cent.

122. The LEA has produced a well-presented and clear Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant action plan which analyses the context, and uses data to set suitably challenging targets for specific groups. It includes a clear indication of the actions to be taken to support African Caribbean children and identifies personnel responsible. The plan links well to the Education Development Plan and proposes joint activities for mainstream and specialist advisers. Resources are closely aligned to priorities. The Minority Ethnic Curriculum Support Service is a well led and successful team, which is valued and highly regarded by the schools, as shown by the school survey and by the school visits, where all four of the schools visited which have contact with the service rated it highly.

123. There is clear evidence of improvement in the achievement of the groups targeted: in one school, 50 per cent of minority ethnic children had reduced the gap between their reading and chronological age by at least one year and the percentage of minority ethnic pupils assessed as below average in oracy skills was halved. Ninety-one per cent were assessed as average or above in comprehension skills.

124. Support for meeting the needs of Traveller children is also well organised and effective and includes specialist Education Welfare Officers in close contact with Traveller sites. Comparison of the achievements of traveller children with low-achieving minority ethnic groups indicates the extent of current underachievement. The LEA's plans use available data to set suitably challenging targets. Useful guidelines have been produced for schools to use in supporting literacy for Traveller children, and links with the Social Services, Health Department Services and voluntary organisations are good. Only one school visited had significant contact with the service. In this school, there was effective in-class support for Traveller children on a considerable scale.

### **Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection**

125. The LEA has clear policies on health and safety. It has provided schools with detailed and useful guidance related to the curriculum, child welfare, health, the personal responsibilities of employees and governors as well as on issues related to premises. The document is comprehensive and useful. Health and safety inspections are routinely carried out.

126. The Education Welfare service has good links with other agencies and provides good support and effective guidance for schools. Training in child protection procedures is provided and there has recently been a significant increase in child protection conferences, partly because teachers' awareness in identifying problems has been raised. The service plan for the Education Welfare Service is comprehensive and based on a sound analysis of need. It contains suitable targets and priorities, and emphasises good links with other appropriate agencies.

127. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties in relation to health, safety, welfare and child protection and collaborates effectively with the Social Services Department to make appropriate provision for children who are looked after.

**Recommendation:**

- (8) In order to improve support for pupils' behaviour the services should be better coordinated; (para 115).

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) In order to improve support for raising pupils' achievements:-
  - continue to improve training and quality control procedures to ensure that school development advisers consistently provide good support for schools and present them with greater challenge (paras 35 and 337);
  - an audit of training needs should be carried out in order to inform the programme of training and support (paras 67 and 69);
  - the strategy for supporting the professional development of headteachers and senior managers should be clarified and formalised (para 67).
- (2) In order to improve support for literacy:-
  - provide more effective support to low-achieving schools by evaluating the effectiveness of strategies which have been deployed and adjusting consultants' work according to the findings (para 45).
- (3) In order to improve support for numeracy:-
  - ensure that all schools are aware of the structures and systems available to develop numeracy and of their entitlement to the ongoing support of consultants (para 57).
- (4) In order to improve support for ICT:-
  - ensure that schools have access to the advice and guidance they need in order to improve teaching quality and pupils' attainment (paras 58, 59 and 60).
- (5) In order to improve communications and to enable effective use of ICT for school administration, a realistic, costed, comprehensive strategy for ICT development should be devised and implemented (paras 80-83).
- (6) In order to improve the quality of building maintenance, advice and services to schools, more effective monitoring of the contract with the private contractor should be carried out to ensure that schools receive a quality service (para 85).
- (7) In order to improve the service, the policy and strategy for inclusion need to be more clearly defined and effectively coordinated (paras 91 and 93).
- (8) In order to improve support for pupils' behaviour the services should be better coordinated; (para 115).