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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local education authority (LEA) on Best Value. 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 discussion with LEA members, staff in the education directorate and in other Council directorates and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 103 schools. The response rate was 81 per cent.

3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 11 primary schools, one junior school, six secondary schools, one special school and two pupil referral units (PRUs). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits considered whether 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. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Herefordshire is an effective Local Education Authority (LEA) that deservedly has the overwhelming support of its schools. Senior officers have established or secured services to schools that are mainly good.

5. The LEA serves an area with a mixed urban and rural economy where small schools and geographical isolation are a common feature. On the Government's ranking of social deprivation Herefordshire is close to the average of all authorities. The county's economy has a limited industrial and technological base and the Herefordshire plan puts a high premium on improving the educational and economic opportunities of the area.

6. Corporate planning is clear and high levels of political consensus are achieved for education within a climate of lively debate. The Herefordshire Plan is impressive, bringing together, as it does, a wide range of partners to support its ambitions. The education directorate makes a key contribution to the implementation of the plan. Elected members have a good understanding of the current educational issues and the key priorities of the Education Development Plan (EDP). High standards for education are expected by elected members and Best Value processes are soundly underway.

7. Standards in schools are higher than national averages at all key stages except Key Stage 1. Improvement in standards is close to the national rate in Key Stage 3 and above it in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 2 the rate of improvement is below the national average. Progress with the implementation of the EDP is satisfactory and the targets in 2000 for English at Key stage 2 and 5 A*-C grades in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) have been achieved.

8. The director of education and senior staff have given good leadership during the transition from the previous authority, and the quality of services to schools has improved. The LEA has particular strengths in: support for the use of performance data, corporate planning and partnerships with other agencies, support for early years education and the procurement of services to schools. Arrangements for the provision for pupils in public care and Traveller children are taken very seriously.

The following services are discharged well:

- targeting of resources to priorities;
- establishing structures for achieving Best Value;
- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support for school improvement;
- services for finance, personnel, property and grounds maintenance;
- asset management;
- support for attendance;
- support for behaviour;
- statutory obligations for pupils with special educational needs;
- admissions to school and the supply of school places;
- provision of education otherwise than at school; and
- consultation and partnership arrangements with schools.

9. There are some key areas where there are weaknesses and these require urgent action:

- the strategy for special educational needs;
- the overall coherence of the information management and information and communication technology (ICT) strategy and particularly the support to schools for ICT in the curriculum;
- the identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern; and
- the measures taken to combat racism.

10. Significant though these weaknesses are, they are few in number and the areas of effective practice greatly outweigh them. the director of education and senior staff have demonstrated their capability to establish an effective and improving LEA and they have the capacity to act on the recommendations of this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

11. Herefordshire Local Education Authority was established on 1 April 1998 following local government re-organisation (LGR). It has a population of 167,900 and a school population of approximately 23,100. The low population figures make Herefordshire the second most sparsely populated county in England. Apart from the five main market towns and the city of Hereford, just over half of the population live in rural areas of very low population density.

12. While Herefordshire's population is close to the median of all authorities on a national scale of socio-economic measures, the county does have areas of deprivation in both rural and urban communities. Relatively high employment figures mask the fact that the average weekly earnings are below national and regional rates. Herefordshire was the first LEA to gain funding for an Education Action Zone incorporating rural and urban schools. The proportion of residents with higher education qualifications is close to the national average. Entitlement of free school meals is low at 8.1 per cent. The proportion of pupils of secondary age with statements of special educational needs is 4.6 per cent which is above the national average. For primary age pupils the figure is 2.2 per cent, also above the national average.

13. Minority ethnic pupils represent 0.5 per cent of the school population. There is a large Traveller population in the county with pupils attending forty of the primary and secondary schools.

14. The authority maintains 85 primary schools, 14 secondary schools, four with sixth forms, three special schools and three pupil referral units (PRUs). An unregistered centre for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) became a special school in September 2000. Herefordshire has a high proportion of denominational schools at 45 per cent. Over a third of primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils on roll and five secondary schools have fewer than 500 pupils.

15. Post 16 students mainly progress to Hereford sixth form college, Hereford College of Technology or the two specialist colleges in the county for Art and Agriculture. The small size and relative isolation of a significant proportion of the county's schools and the consequent high cost of school transport are key factors for the LEA's policy and strategies.

Performance

16. OFSTED inspections and the LEA's baseline data indicate that pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is above that found nationally. Since the LEA was established, the performance of pupils in Herefordshire schools has been above national averages in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Results in Key Stage 1 in 2000 rose just above the national average for the first time.

17. Between 1998 and 1999 the overall rate of improvement in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 was slower than that found nationally. Results in both

subjects have risen by three per cent in 2000. Over the same period results at Key Stage 3 in mathematics improved at the national rate whilst in English results fell as they did nationally. English results at Key Stage 3 improved significantly in 2000 and mathematics results also rose. At Key Stage 3 girls' attainment is significantly better than that of boys.

18. Improvement in GCSE attainment is faster than the national rate. All measures of GCSE results rose between 1998 and 1999, and this trend has continued in 2000. In GCSE, the LEA target in 2000 for the percentage of pupils gaining five A*-C grades and the average point score have been exceeded. For the small number of pupils, both in Key Stage 4 and school sixth forms, who take vocational qualifications the percentage gaining accreditation has fluctuated considerably, and no trends are evident since 1998. Similar variations have occurred since 1998 in the average points score per pupil in sixth forms for those entered for two or more A-level examinations.

19. At present, Herefordshire has one secondary and one primary school requiring special measures. One primary school has improved sufficiently to be removed from this category. Eight schools have been identified with serious weaknesses in the past three years. Four no longer require monitoring by OFSTED and one school has been removed from serious weaknesses after its second OFSTED inspection. There is one beacon school in the county.

20. The most recent OFSTED data on Herefordshire's primary schools shows that, in overall terms, 81 per cent of schools were graded good or very good; this figure is above the national average and that of similar LEAs. The proportion of secondary schools graded good or very good (75 per cent) is also above the national average but the figure is below that of similar LEAs. Evidence from those primary and secondary schools that have been inspected twice indicates improvements have been achieved, particularly in school management and the quality of education.

21. In 1999 both primary and secondary school attendance was above national figures. Unauthorised absence was below the national average for primary schools, and broadly in line with national figures for secondary schools.

22. Permanent exclusions of both boys and girls were above the national average in Herefordshire's secondary schools, but have reduced significantly over the past two years. Permanent exclusions are in line with the average in primary schools.

Funding

23. Education spending is currently at the level of the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). The Council has passed on increases in full to schools at a time of reductions in other areas of Council spending. Within the education budget, spending on under-fives and post 16 provision in schools is significantly above the relevant SSA sub blocks, expenditure on adult education and youth service provision is significantly below. Spending has been allocated to early years provision reflecting its position as an EDP priority.

24. Whilst the Council looks some years ahead in predicting factors likely to affect its budget, it has not developed a strategy which clearly identifies key developmental priorities and how the resources necessary to deliver them will be secured. Services

do not have detailed guidance on the direction in which overall spending is expected to move. This is a shortcoming in planning as Herefordshire's commitment to clear corporate objectives may well require changes to existing levels and patterns of service delivery. Whilst the education directorate has a business performance plan extending three years ahead, resource requirements have not been identified and it is not clear how they will be met.

25. Arrangements in the education directorate for developing bids and co-ordinating submissions are good and few, if any, opportunities are missed. The LEA has been successful in obtaining grants to supplement its spending on schools. Two significant Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) projects have been approved and the LEA took the initiative in developing the successful Education Action Zone proposal. Bids for New Deal for Schools and Infant Class Size Grants have also been successful. Consultation with schools on the preparation of bids and the deployment of funds are also good. Support is available for individual schools in bidding direct for grant and investigating other possible sources of funding for their own initiatives. Clearer strategies need to be developed to help schools manage as grant funding comes to an end.

26. For capital spending, the Council has supplemented its borrowing and grant income by diverting significant sums from its revenue budget. A Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme to replace a secondary school building has been prepared but has not yet gained DfEE approval.

Council structure

27. The composition of Herefordshire Council changed in the May 2000 elections such that no single party has overall control. The Council comprises Liberal Democrats 21, Conservatives 21, Independents 14 and Labour four. Council leadership is through an arrangement between the Liberal Democrats, Independents and Labour members.

28. Since April 1999 Herefordshire has energetically embraced the modernising agenda. A seven member cabinet is advised by seven programme panels, one for each of the six service areas of the Council which are social care, education, housing, economic development, social development and environment plus a policy and finance panel. Four monitoring and review committees carry out the scrutiny role and manage the Best Value Review procedures. A strategic monitoring and review committee has overall responsibility for scrutiny. The cabinet and monitoring and review committees report to full Council regularly. Appropriate checks and balances are in place and a small standards committee upholds the Council's code of conduct. Evidence from discussion and documentation indicates that elected members have a good understanding and involvement in the debate and decision making for education as a result of the new structures.

29. The education directorate operates through three divisions: one for policy, planning and resources, another for children and student services and the third for inspection, advice and school performance services.

The Education Development Plan

30. The LEA's Education Development Plan (EDP) provides a satisfactory framework for school improvement and has received DfEE approval for three years. It has eight

priorities, which are :

- to raise pupils' performance in literacy;
- to raise pupils' performance in numeracy;
- to ensure that all early years pupils make the best possible start;
- to improve the provision and use of ICT at all key stages;
- to raise the expectations and overall performance of boys and able pupils and investigate the underachievement of identified groups;
- to improve pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4;
- to improve further the leadership and management in schools; and
- to improve the performance of all schools and particularly those giving cause for concern.

31. The priorities for improvement in the EDP are wide, appropriately covering national priorities and some local factors, notably early years education. A thorough audit of schools' needs was carried out in consultation with headteachers and other partners. The plan has gained strong support from schools because it is relevant to their own priorities. Senior officers communicate well with schools. They both listen to and seek advice from headteachers and governors on key policy developments. There are close links between planning in the EDP with the work of the Education Action Zone (EAZ) and other partners. These EAZ collaborations are evident in relation to early years education and the work related curriculum in high schools. However, opportunities for joint ICT working with the EAZ are not fully exploited. Clear planning and operational links are also made with the actions in the Behaviour Support Plan, the Early Years Childcare Development plan (EYCDP) and the education business performance plan (EBPP). Action planning in the EDP is sound with activities, personnel and timescales clearly identified. However some success criteria are too vague.

32. Progress on the implementation of the EDP is sound. The LEA targets are realistic in most areas and challenging for literacy and numeracy. Key Stage 2 results show that the 2000 literacy target of 77 per cent has been met and that the mathematics result is 1.6 percentage points below the target of 76 per cent. At Key Stage 4 the percentage of pupils attaining five A* to C grades is 53 per cent, which is above the 2000 target and equal to the target for 2001. These 2000 results indicate that targets could be more challenging. Permanent exclusions from secondary schools have fallen in the past two years and the LEA is in line to meet its target for 2001. Progress has been unsatisfactory in implementing the plans for ICT.

33. A review of the EDP conducted by the LEA in March 2000 accurately indicates good progress with a number of priorities, but fails to analyse the impact of actions in raising standards in schools. The LEA recognises this and is considering how to improve the EDP so that it reflects higher expectations for the future and establishes more focused targets and success indicators with which to evaluate outcomes.

34. The inspection advice and school performance service (IASPS) is the key service for implementing and monitoring progress on the EDP. The priorities of the plan are monitored each term by the senior inspector with lead officers and at whole team meetings of the IASPS. Elected members have received informative progress reports on thirteen items related to the EDP in the past two years.

The allocation of resources to priorities

35. The LEA is effective in directing resources to its education priorities. This is particularly reflected in early years provision, the allocation for school buildings and the design of the schools' funding formula which distributes resources in relation to need. Budget consultations with schools include discussion with headteacher representatives at formative stages of the process. Governor involvement is principally at a later stage when a limited range of options have been identified. Schools believe that their views are listened to and that they have a genuine opportunity to influence outcomes.

36. Overall spending on primary schools is very close to the unitary authority average. Spending on secondary schools is significantly below, although the fact that there are relatively few sixth form pupils in Herefordshire schools affects the comparison.

	Herefordshire	Unitary Authorities	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget LSB per pupil	£2196	£2197	£2294
Secondary Local Schools Budget LSB per pupil	£2765	£2917	£2987

37. The proportion of the Local Schools Budget (LSB) controlled centrally in 2000/2001 is relatively high (Individual Schools Budget (ISB) 78.8 per cent of LSB) compared to the average for unitary authorities (81.9 per cent). However, the rural nature of the authority results in a high spend on home to school transport (6.5 per cent of LSB compared to 2.5 per cent for the unitary authority average) and this more than accounts for the difference between the overall delegation. Schools are generally content with the range of responsibilities delegated. Centrally controlled spending on statutory and regulatory duties and on school improvement is close to the unitary authorities average. Services provided to education by other council departments are subject to service level agreements which can be varied by negotiation.

38. Delegated funding for Herefordshire primary and secondary schools reflects the lower level of delegation within the LSB.

	Herefordshire	Unitary Authorities	All English LEAs
Primary Individual Schools Budget ISB per pupil	£1629	£1667	£1734
Secondary Individual Schools Budget ISB per pupil	£2217	£2400	£2433

39. For its first budget the LEA consulted schools extensively on the rationale for its funding formula. Since incorporation, changes to funding have principally reflected statutory requirements. Primary school funding per pupil has risen overall by more than that for secondary. The LEA has some well developed models of school spending needs which it uses effectively to ensure that allocations to schools under the formula provide what is required. These are not, however shared with schools however and this inhibits their involvement in discussion and review. Whilst consultation has been thorough where changes to elements of the formula have been proposed, the nature of

the LEA's approach can only be understood if the outcomes of the formula as a whole are considered.

40. From the outset of the LEA budgetary control has been sound. The current year's budget is likely to be accurate at individual service level. There has been some growth in spending on pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools. Nevertheless, spending on the broad range of SEN provision is below the average for unitary authorities and this rise in spending gives no cause for concern.

Best Value

41. Member involvement so far in the planning and conduct of Best Value reviews in the education service has been substantial and has had the additional benefit of strengthening collaborative working with officers. A particular benefit arising from the commitment to partnership working with other public agencies in Herefordshire has been the sharing of staff across agencies to strengthen the challenge component of Best Value review.

42. The Council is basing its approach on the development of a business planning cycle incorporating the key principles of Best Value review. The five yearly fundamental service reviews are intended to build on the business planning work and offer opportunities to explore issues in greater depth. Useful corporate guidance has been provided both on business planning and the conduct of Best Value reviews. This includes helpful advice on approaches to consultation, benchmarking service performance and cost, and a wide range of options for service delivery. The external auditor has reviewed the preparation and publication of the Council's Best Value Performance Plan and confirmed that statutory requirements have been met.

43. The education directorate is establishing benchmark indicators for its services in the service aims of the EBPP and is reasonably well placed to take on Best Value reviews in the future. For much of its work consultation is effective. The recently produced service aims include clear objectives which would benefit from being more specific. In the area of competition the education directorate is open and forward thinking. The first Best Value review, on the education welfare service, will be completed in March 2001.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic planning:

- strengthen the EDP so that targets and success criteria enable improved evaluation of the impact of the plan's activities.

In order to improve the overall budget strategy:

- develop a budget strategy for the medium-term and require each main service area to develop plans which are consistent with it;
- revise the education business performance plan to incorporate the resource requirements for each area of activity and indicate how these resources will be secured; and

- share more clearly with schools the models of educational need which underpin the LEA's funding formula.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

44. The EDP identifies appropriate priorities for improving schools and the resources are well targeted at priorities. School improvement is well supported by the services of the policy and resources section. The support of the children and student services section for individuals and groups of pupils contributes significantly to raising standards particularly in relation to behaviour, attendance, pupils in public care and pupils out of school. The high quality training and guidance for special educational needs support has a positive impact on school improvement. However, the lack of a clear strategy document on inclusion constrains the ability of schools to plan.

45. Corporate strategy and the energy and vision of some key staff in the LEA have established good strategic partnerships with organisations beyond the council and this is leading to positive developments in the curriculum. The Herefordshire Plan has an appropriate ambition for life long learning with intentions to enhance the community and parental support for education.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

46. The LEA strategy for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support is clear. Headteachers understand both the strategy and its principles. Challenge and support to schools from the inspection advice and school performance service (IASPS) is generally good. The procedures for monitoring schools are satisfactory. In the main, the LEA effectively intervenes in inverse proportion to success but in a few notable instances the impact of the intervention has been unsatisfactory.

47. The IASPS uses a system which forms the basis of an effective monitoring and support service. A useful individual school profile is in place which includes performance measures on attainment, progress and management information gathered from LEA departments, school inspection reports, DfEE data, the school improvement plan and the school itself. Profiles are updated regularly and form the basis for monitoring schools. The purpose of one of the contact inspector visits is to discuss with the headteacher future development priorities and any LEA support that is needed. Governors are not routinely involved in these discussions and this is a shortcoming. The profile, together with the contact inspectors' half-termly discussions with the leader of the IASPS service, results in a termly grade for each school. This acts both as an indicator of improvement and an alert to deterioration. In principle, this is a good procedure but the profile requires further detail and the criteria used for allocating the grades are too broad. When fully developed it will be a good basis for efficient monitoring and better-targeted visits to those schools that need intervention and support. School profiles for 2000 to 2001 and records of previous years indicate that the IASPS planned support to schools is in inverse proportion to their success.

48. The IASPS makes two additional visits yearly to each school, one for setting targets and the other to support the EDP priority for improving the quality of teaching. In some, but not all schools, this latter visit is effectively used to develop the skills of senior staff and subject leaders in lesson monitoring and feedback to staff to improve the quality of teaching. A small resource of inspector time for specific reviews can be used by the LEA, or, at the request of a school, to review and amend identified weaknesses.

The LEA has an appropriately flexible allocation of time for these activities in response to the specific needs of the one third of its schools where the headteacher has a class commitment of up to 80 per cent each week.

49. Evidence from interviews, documentation and schools visits indicates that the support and advice given to schools are at least satisfactory and in many instances good. Thirteen of the 17 schools visited were clear that the LEA gives satisfactory or good support to the school's capacity to improve and the work of the contact inspector was often highly praised. The challenge they provide to headteachers and chairs of governors over school targets, attainment, and standards is effective and as a result, in many schools, target setting and self-evaluation are improving.

50. The EDP actions determine the work of the IASPS and this is made clear to schools. They have an entitlement to inspector and adviser time not exceeding three days in a year, unless they are in special measures or serious weaknesses in which case they receive more in relation to the LEA's action plan. This basic provision is met from the LEA budget and grant funding. Additional IASPS services, training, Inset, subject and interview advice are charged at a specified rate. All schools use the service, and buy additional support both from the LEA and other providers.

51. The IASPS is soundly managed in small teams where the support for school improvement is often very good. The service has sufficient staff with appropriate expertise. The service is developing to meet the needs of schools through staff training and staffing changes. The exception is ICT in the curriculum. Staff are effectively deployed to address the priorities of the EDP and the demanding multiple roles of the team are appropriately monitored.

52. Overall, the IASPS makes a planned, differentiated and effective contribution to school improvement at a cost which is equal to the national average for school improvement. The service is reasonably well placed through its EDP consultation, the recent introduction of performance management and service planning to address the requirements of Best Value.

Collection and analysis of data

53. Support for target setting is a strength. Evidence from documentation, discussions and school visits demonstrate that the LEA provides schools with a good service for the collection and analysis of data, and that it has improved significantly in the past year. Primary and secondary schools regard it as good and above the average for LEAs. Special schools regard it as satisfactory.

54. Primary schools receive assessment data and key questions to consider in relation to Key Stage 1 and 2 results and targets. This information is laid out in a variety of ways enabling schools to compare themselves with other Herefordshire schools and schools nationally and to use prior attainment to predict future results. In addition, they receive subject residuals and value-added graphs for English, mathematics and science as well as an analysis of the free school meal and special educational needs context of their school. Secondary schools receive a similar package which they use together with their own performance data and the annual information received from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Although secondary schools are well advanced with their use of pupil performance data, they find the Herefordshire

information valuable for local comparisons and as a means of identifying good practice nearby. Systems are developing for the electronic transfer of data to all schools.

55. LEA guidance on the use of pupil performance data to set targets is very clear, as is the guidance for establishing curriculum targets for literacy and numeracy. Most headteachers have gained confidence in interpreting data in order to inform their future strategies. The data is also becoming central to the LEA's improving ability to monitor schools, to identify weaknesses in LEA services and in schools, and to recognise and link schools to centres of good practice. The LEA's data analysis identifies attainment by gender, analyses standards for higher attaining pupils and gives good information on the attainment of Traveller pupils and those in public care. However, details on the attainment of the small number of ethnic minority pupils is not centrally held and monitored, and this is a weakness.

56. Good advice to schools on how to interpret and make use of the data for raising standards has been provided through headteacher workshops and training for assessment coordinators and governors. Contact inspectors challenge schools on targets set at the annual discussion with headteachers. Schools visited reported these discussions as both valuable and rigorous. If the targets identified by the school are too low the LEA uses data effectively to present strong arguments to the school for raising the figures. In a number of cases this persuasion has resulted in higher expectations and valuable discussion of appropriate improvement strategies.

Support for literacy

57. The LEA's support for improving standards of literacy is good. The strategy is clearly set out within the EDP and progress against targets is regularly evaluated. Consultants effectively use monitoring data to inform future priorities and actions. As a result, training has been well targeted using national and locally produced materials, and an additional literacy consultant has been employed to focus on improving writing. Improvement is based on the implementation of the national literacy strategy and also encompasses a range of activities taking place within the Education Action Zone.

58. Between 1998 and 1999, Key Stage 2 English results were above the national average but the overall rate of improvement is not as fast as that found nationally. Key Stage 2 results in 1998 and 1999 were broadly in line with similar LEAs. In 2000, the results were equal to the LEA target of 77 per cent of pupils gaining level 4 and above. At Key Stage 3 English results are above national averages and have fluctuated in the past two years as they have nationally.

59. The LEA's Key Stage 2 target of 86 per cent of pupils attaining level 4 or above in English for 2002 is recognised as challenging since it had to be carried forward from the Hereford and Worcestershire authority without the possibility of appropriate amendment. However, the schools' aggregate target for 2001 is 78 per cent and this has resulted in a revised Herefordshire target of 81 per cent for 2001. Sufficient consultant time is now available to support the emphasis on boys and writing as the main improvement strategy at Key Stage 2. Although appropriate and well targeted, this may not secure the overall improvement needed to achieve the LEA's target of 86 per cent for 2002 without effective school self evaluation to improve the quality of teaching.

60. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy has been good; consultants are well managed and there is effective communication with contact inspectors. Schools in need of intensive support have been accurately identified and challenged by the LEA to address concerns over teaching quality. A thorough audit of needs has resulted in the setting of curricular targets. LEA support, and monitoring by literacy consultants and inspectors, is well aligned to these targets.

61. Responses to the school survey from primary and special schools indicate that they regard support for literacy as good. School visits indicate that the high quality of expertise, strategic advice and training offered by the literacy team is highly valued. Schools receiving intensive support, and those outside this cohort, are clear about what support to expect. Several, including those causing concern, cite examples of the positive impact of consultants' work on improved teaching quality and raising standards. Training equips contact inspectors to provide effective guidance for the implementation of the strategy through monitoring visits, which include lesson observations and target-setting meetings with headteachers. Sound links are beginning to be made between LEA schools and those in the EAZ through a lead literacy teacher programme focusing on the role of teaching assistants plus a project to improve writing.

62. Training on literacy at Key Stage 3 has been well received by schools and some have policies in place. This work will continue in line with national developments. Some school clusters are effectively supporting the transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 through the work of lead teachers and Year 6 and Year 7 teacher exchanges.

Support for numeracy

63. Support for numeracy is good in primary schools and satisfactory in secondary and special schools. Standards in mathematics are increasing, and the rate of improvement has gained some momentum. Attainment in mathematics at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 is above the national average. At Key Stage 3, standards have risen by over five per cent in the last year compared with four per cent over the previous two years. There has been a similar acceleration in the past year at Key Stage 2, where previously the improvement had not been as fast as that found nationally. As a result of targeting pupils who attained standards below the national average at Key Stage 1, the LEA is now on course to meet its 2002 Key Stage 2 target. Seventy-eight per cent of pupils are expected to attain level 4 or better, which is three per cent above the national target.

64. The National Numeracy Strategy has been well introduced. Prior to its start a good basis of early implementation was established. EDP priority 2 identifies the LEA's strategy for raising standards in numeracy. The activities are the right ones and include the use of assessment data, continuity of provision between Key Stages 2 and 3, co-ordination in primary schools and training for teaching assistants. Success criteria are precise and progress is regularly monitored and evaluated, and plans adjusted.

65. The numeracy team is hard working, well led and well managed. The consultants are experienced practitioners whose advice is rooted in recent classroom practice. The team has forged effective links with the early years and SEN inspectors, and with contact inspectors who monitor teaching and learning in schools. Training has addressed important local issues, such as boys' motivation at Key Stage 1 and planning for mixed-age classes in small schools. The identification and use of leading

teachers have served to spread good practice. Target setting is becoming more effective as schools are encouraged to set curricular targets.

66. Schools in need of intensive support have been accurately identified and their progress monitored carefully. School visits indicate that intensive support is mainly very practical and specific to each school's needs; for schools in the first cohort it has led to improved co-ordination, a change in teaching methods, more detailed planning and better targeting of individual pupils. Consultants have made a positive contribution to raising standards. Working links have been established with the EAZ to improve the subject knowledge and competence of teaching assistants. EAZ targets for summer schools and teaching strategies link directly to activities in the EDP. The LEA has developed effective transfer policy guidelines between Key Stages 2 and 3 in order to share good practice, to develop common transfer forms and to encourage bridging activities between schools. Initial training for the implementation of the strategy at Key Stage 3 was effective in raising staff awareness but curricular liaison is not firmly established between primary and secondary schools.

Support for ICT

67. Support for curriculum ICT is unsatisfactory. The LEA is right to identify ICT as a priority having started from a low base, both in terms of resources and standards. In common with schools nationally, ICT is frequently a key issue for attention in Section 10 reports, although standards are slightly better than the national picture. In nearly a third of schools inspected, pupil attainment was below the national average and progress is less satisfactory at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 1. The LEA is reliant on Section 10 reports to judge standards at primary level and has not undertaken analysis of Key Stage 3 data. At Key Stage 4 the pass rate at GCSE A* - C is above the national average.

68. In spite of the delay in initial funding for the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), all schools will be connected to the Internet ahead of time. The LEA has provided advice to schools on New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training, and has established a network of experienced practitioners to support the significant number of schools which opted to sign up with the provider recommended by the LEA. Little advance has been made, however, on developing the education components of a county web site in order to provide schools with information and resources on line and to disseminate good practice. The development of an Intranet has also been slow and is a cause of frustration to schools.

69. The LEA's strategy for developing the ICT curriculum in schools does not pay enough attention to raising standards and has not been managed well. Schools have received adequate advice and support in choosing systems and managing their implementation, but there has been insufficient guidance on how to use these tools to develop the curriculum across all subjects. Although a significant proportion of one adviser's time has been diverted to capture sophisticated data sets, senior management has not fully tackled staffing issues. This has impacted adversely on the quality of support, training and advice provided to schools. Curriculum advisers do not enjoy credibility in all schools. Overall progress has been slow.

70. Criteria for monitoring schools' performance are imprecise and, as a result, the basis on which work is prioritised is not reliable. Advisers have spent unnecessary time

on maintenance issues. Inspectors have been insufficiently involved in evaluating the impact on teaching and learning.

71. Insufficient work has been done in identifying and disseminating good practice. The use of ICT as part of the literacy and numeracy strategies is not well advanced. Worthwhile work has been undertaken by an advanced skills teacher in schools where there are weaknesses in ICT, but the LEA has yet to capitalise on the innovative developments in the EAZ or the Beacon partnership. EAZ schools visited during the inspection demonstrated a good increase in skills, knowledge and confidence amongst staff and pupils. Schools across the LEA judge the quality of support and training to be variable and inadequate for their needs. On visits where ICT was a focus, two-thirds of schools rated it unsatisfactory.

Support for schools causing concern

72. Support for the small number of schools requiring special measures is good and in the main the LEA gives effective support to schools with serious weaknesses. However, criteria for identifying schools which cause the LEA concern are insufficiently detailed and their application is not well understood by schools. In addition, the support for this group of 11 schools has been variable in its speed of intervention and overall effectiveness. As a result the LEA's provision is unsatisfactory.

73. The LEA has one secondary school and one primary school identified as requiring special measures, and a further school was removed from this category within fifteen months of its inspection. Eight schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses, one secondary and seven primary, four of which have improved sufficiently to have no further monitoring visits by OFSTED. One primary school was removed from this category at its recent school inspection. The LEA has identified a further eleven schools which cause concern resulting in a large number of schools needing intervention. Elected members receive summary reports of progress in schools in special measures, those with serious weaknesses and those causing concerns.

74. The EDP has a priority to improve the performance of schools causing concern with the clear target of having no schools in these categories by 2002. This is attainable if existing procedures are made more rigorous. Despite the weaknesses identified above the LEA, through its monitoring procedures, knows its schools well and has identified the right schools for additional support. The LEA strategy sets clear procedures for helping these schools develop action plans and set targets. The contact inspector coordinates and monitors the support which is provided from appropriate departments across the LEA.

75. The LEA successfully uses the secondment of headteachers within the authority to work in schools with significant difficulties. In a notable case, officers took effective action to use the statutory powers of intervention within four weeks of the LEA's inception and this succeeded in halting the very serious decline in one school. Evidence from visits to four schools identified by the LEA as causing concern demonstrates that effective and early intervention accompanied by guidance and training has helped schools to improve. It has developed their capacity to become self-evaluating institutions capable of continued improvement. By contrast, in three schools visited, the LEA response had been too slow. Officers had become too involved in the

work of senior staff and governors. As a result these schools were becoming too dependent on the LEA and this was constraining their ability to be autonomous. In one case the LEA had been slow to use its statutory powers of intervention.

Support for governors

76. The support provided for governors presents a mixed picture, but is satisfactory overall. The governors' support service (GSS) is very well regarded by most governing bodies. It provides clear and comprehensive information and advice in regular notes of guidance and through its efficient helpline. Clerks receive good support through training and a practical survival guide that is regularly updated. A central training programme, with a range of relevant courses, is provided by the LEA, but the take-up is relatively low. This support is unsatisfactory in assisting governors to discharge their role in evaluating the effectiveness of the school.

77. Support for governors is managed across two branches of the education directorate. It has a tight budget and is run by a service manager with professional support from IASPS. A management group meets termly to monitor the strategy. Mechanisms to identify training needs and to monitor and evaluate courses are not fully in place. The LEA acknowledges the need for a more flexible approach to training targeted at groups of governors and individual governing bodies. Support is targeted on those schools where governance has been identified as a weakness but the LEA does not formally evaluate the effectiveness of this support.

78. The school survey and visits to schools indicate that governors regard the LEA as helpful, accessible and generally quick to respond to problems, emergencies and vacancies. Where support is unsatisfactory governors have been over-reliant on the LEA rather than developing skills for themselves.

Support for school management

79. The LEA's support for school management is satisfactory, but there are some weaknesses. Leadership and management in schools, although improving, is identified as a weakness in a significant number of school inspection reports and is therefore a priority in the EDP. The fact that more than a third of primary schools are below 100 pupils and many of these headteachers have significant class teaching commitments is a contributory factor. In the school survey, support for headteachers and senior management was considered to be good overall. Officers are accessible and responsive and the contact inspector is a key factor in establishing effective working relationships. Their visits provide high quality professional development for senior staff on issues such as lesson monitoring, data use and target setting, and curriculum management. There is a good degree of consistency in the way that the inspectors' roles are defined and carried out; their detailed knowledge of the school and its past history were seen as extremely beneficial when wrestling with difficult management decisions.

80. The LEA has developed a coherent management development programme for headteachers and deputies. It has actively encouraged participation in the national leadership programmes for aspiring, new and experienced headteachers and has supplemented these with courses and workshops. Although the LEA does not provide mentors, new headteachers feel well supported. The programme for subject co-

ordinators in primary schools is restricted to the core subjects and there is inadequate support for middle managers in secondary schools. Although the LEA has identified small schools as a major priority it has not developed a long-term strategy to exploit the potential of ICT in reducing management overload and networking good practice.

81. Many schools have attended the LEA's school self-evaluation training and headteachers' skills are improving. A further modular course on school self-evaluation is planned to help schools raise standards through rigorous analysis of their own practice. The LEA has not done enough targeted work to develop the capability of all schools to evaluate their own progress and to identify development needs through classroom observation and curriculum monitoring.

82. Support for teachers is provided by the IASPS in those areas where there is officer expertise and this is supplemented with external consultants. There is no formal brokerage procedure but inspectors routinely recommend outside providers. The continuing professional development programme focuses on priorities in the EDP. Less than 10 per cent of courses are cancelled and additional courses are run when there is over-subscription. Course evaluations indicate a good level of satisfaction but there has been insufficient dissemination by the authority of evident good practice in the EAZ to other LEA schools. Similarly, the Beacon School Partnership's focus on good practice in teaching, leadership and management has not yet influenced countywide developments. Advanced skills teachers (AST) are in place in most subject areas. Their work has been well received in schools. The LEA has an effective strategy for supporting schools in the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQT). The school survey judged support for NQTs to be satisfactory, however six schools visited spoke highly of the quality of the support and training for NQTs, induction tutors and mentors.

Support for early years education

83. Early years education is a strength and a priority within the EDP. This priority is well integrated with literacy, numeracy, underachieving pupils and the focus on raising standards for boys. There are sufficient places available for all four-year-olds. There is some way to go before achieving the government target for three-year-old places, but provision is well targeted to the most vulnerable children. The LEA has had baseline assessment in place for three years and scores have increased steadily over that time. The LEA is now in a position to monitor the impact on results at Key Stage 1.

84. The early years childcare development plan (EYCDP) is comprehensive, well constructed and based on an extensive analysis of need. The early years team is very effectively led, with a clear drive for further improvement. Good progress has been made on all seven activities in the EDP. The effective use of experienced practitioners as mentor teachers has influenced practice in pre-school settings and reception classes. There are direct links to the work of the EAZ with community and family learning initiatives supported by early access to specialist skills to tackle pupils' specific learning difficulties. Close collaboration with the EAZ has been forged with the SEN inspector and the Hereford learning support service (HLSS) in developing an early intervention strategy. Attendance at all partnership meetings and training events is very high and courses are frequently re-run to meet demand.

85. The LEA has recently produced detailed guidance on the widely used early years profile to ensure greater consistency and reliability in its use for assessment, planning

and target setting, and to establish a shared system of transferring records across all settings. Schools have been encouraged to develop self-evaluation through involvement in the effective early learning Project (EEL). The positive impact on learning has been noted in OFSTED reports.

Support for 14-19 education

86. The LEA recognises that its support in widening the range of curricular options on offer at Key Stage 4, and for securing 14 to 19 progression, has not significantly impacted on schools across the authority. However, there is much to build on by capitalising on existing partnerships, and through the dissemination of good pilot work. The LEA is beginning to benefit from work in the EAZ which is making a significant contribution to improved access to the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and increasing pupils' employability through work-related learning. This has included GNVQ accreditation and a multi-agency 'New Start' project for disaffected pupils. Both developments have resulted in improvements in attendance. An increase in the number of pupils completing statutory schooling has resulted from similar work in a pupil referral unit (PRU).

87. An impressive feature of the LEA's approach is the very strong and effective strategic partnerships forged locally with businesses, training providers and colleges of further education. Overall aims for learning opportunities for 14-19 year olds are clear, and there are sound links between relevant plans and policies. The action plan within the EBPP 2000-2003 details how strands will inter-link in line with performance targets. Although still mostly working at a strategic level, the LEA is clear about steps to be taken in disseminating and building on existing developments.

Recommendations

In order to raise standards:

- Sharpen the strategy for developing ICT across the curriculum, in order to target identified weaknesses by increasing the focus on teaching, and ensuring that staff have the skills to implement it successfully;
- hasten the development of an Intranet and county web site to encourage professional networking; and
- plan further support for high schools to address the gap in the performance of girls and boys in English at Key Stage 3.

In order to improve LEA monitoring:

- further develop the use of data for school monitoring, and reduce visits to schools in line with the Code of Practice.

In order to improve the effectiveness of support to schools with serious weaknesses or causing concern, steps should be taken to:

- develop and improve the procedures for identifying schools causing concern so that the grade criteria have sufficient detail and are fully understood by schools; and

- take prompt action to support schools causing concern and those with serious weaknesses, and ensure that schools take responsibility for their development as self evaluating, autonomous organisations.

In order to improve the effectiveness of management:

- implement a management development strategy for middle managers in high schools; and
- clarify for schools the processes used to identify good practice both in the LEA and the EAZ, and ensure that links are made for its dissemination.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

88. Corporate planning is good. Councillors are forward thinking and the ten ambitions of the Herefordshire plan for economic and community development are well articulated. Education plays a clear role in the achievement of these ambitions and benefits from its involvement in corporate developments. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive give clear leadership to cross service working, both in the formulation and delivery of the plan and the establishment of senior posts to facilitate cross service collaboration. The plan is much more than a series of generalised aspirations. Operational groups have been established on which education is represented and some senior officers in the education directorate have leadership responsibilities. The Council has been instrumental in setting up the Herefordshire partnership which has representation from a wide range of local and regional organisations. These partnerships are a strength of the Council's policy and provide the vision and energy through which Herefordshire has addressed its new agenda.

89. The cabinet member for education works closely with other elected members. Advice from the programme panel is given due consideration in order to inform cabinet and directorate decisions on matters including financial issues. Members receive clear and well focused information from officers. Overall processes for education planning are satisfactory and scrutiny by the monitoring and review committee is being refined to ensure that it gives officers or contractors clear guidance and robust challenge.

90. The senior management of the education directorate comprises the director of education and three heads of service. The leadership and management of education has many strengths and some weaknesses. It was rightly a priority for the new authority to ensure that the day-to-day operations of the education directorate were effective. This has largely been achieved. The LEA has developed very good relationships with its schools. Services have been well established and the provision is generally good. As a result a strong sense of partnership has developed between schools and the LEA in most areas of work.

91. The LEA has put in place all the required statutory plans which, in turn, are effectively cross-referenced to other departments, agencies and initiatives. The key activities of these plans are helpfully brought together in the three-year EBPP which summarises the actions for the education directorate. The EDP has a strong focus on raising achievement. The EDP is strongly endorsed by elected members who have a clear understanding of, and interest in, its priorities. The immediate action by the LEA in 1998 to bid for an EAZ was a good decision, and the EDP indicates some close links with the EAZ at the planning level. In practice these collaborations are emerging slowly, but where they do occur they are proving very effective for disseminating good practice to all schools.

92. In a small number of key areas strategy is underdeveloped, for example in SEN, ICT across the LEA, intervention in schools causing concern, measures to combat racism and disseminating good practice.

93. The planning and performance management of education services are generally good but with shortcomings in long-term resource planning and evaluation. Service

aims are based upon performance management requirements and include detailed analysis of progress towards local and national targets together with national best value indicators. The associated action plans in the EBPP are clear and well linked to the EDP. The resource allocation to these actions is insufficiently detailed. A majority of service teams are effective in their work with schools. These strengths derive from staff with high levels of expertise, a good knowledge of the needs of schools and efficient response times. Individual staff targets are set as part of the annual performance management and review process for all council employees. The education directorate regularly monitors its work and satisfactorily consults schools about the quality of the services provided. Evaluation of the effect and impact of the EDP on standards and school improvement are less well developed.

Partnerships with other agencies and local government departments

94. Effective partnership working with other Council departments and a wide range of external bodies is a strength of the Council and the education directorate. The new unitary authority set out to form close links with other public services, voluntary organisations and local colleges, through the Herefordshire partnership, in order to deliver the Council's priorities. The planning and partnership directorate of the Council has had a strong impact on education and this strategic approach benefits schools and their pupils. Encouraged by the LEA, the local pyramid partnerships between schools are already supporting improvement in both secondary and primary schools. Good corporate working relationships between education, social services and health are generally beginning to have a discernible and beneficial impact on education for the most vulnerable children and their families.

95. The LEA enjoys productive relationships with a wide range of agencies such as the police, who work closely with schools on health education and citizenship issues. Consultation and communication between the diocesan education bodies and the LEA are regular and effective.

Management services

96. Support for schools in the procurement of services is a particular strength of the LEA. The information provided to schools, on each service, is good. It includes details of both centrally funded and traded services, and provides a worthwhile basis for evaluating service delivery. The LEA is committed to making centrally funded services as accountable to schools as those subject to buy back. Guidance includes an outline of any requirements which schools not buying a service from the LEA will have to meet, for example in respect of statutory duties. The information enables schools to make a fully informed decision on whether to purchase the LEA's services. Client support for the procurement of services from external providers is also well regarded by schools.

97. Consultation with schools on the development of service offers has been good, and surveys of user satisfaction have been satisfactorily co-ordinated. The range of choice offered within each service area is limited, particularly for those services subject to buy back for the first time this year. Although currently not a problem for schools, the LEA will need to ensure that, as schools become more familiar with commissioning services, the choice offered matches their developing needs.

98. Support for financial management is good. Accounting arrangements meet all

schools' basic needs and, following the introduction of the Council's new financial information system, the reconciliation of data held at school and LEA level is no longer problematic. Information and support for school budget planning and review are good. Staff are generally regarded as responsive and helpful. The notification of delegated budgets is close to the start of the financial year, but useful indicative information is provided earlier in the budget process. A new payroll system has been introduced and is now working satisfactorily. Appropriate contact is maintained with schools with financial difficulties. Few schools have had deficits in recent years, with only one giving significant cause for concern. Financial benchmarking data has been provided to secondary schools and is about to be provided for primaries.

99. Support provided by the personnel service is very good. It is proactive in the provision of information and advice, both through written material and briefings at meetings for headteachers and governors. Casework support is regarded by schools as reliable, robust, and focused on school improvement, whilst maintaining due care for the interests of individuals.

100. The provision of school meals is satisfactory. Whilst all secondary schools and about a half of primary schools provide hot school meals for all who wish to take them, a significant minority of primary schools provide packed lunches for free school meal pupils only. There are some indications that this adversely affects applications for free school meals by those entitled to them.

101. Home to school transport is sound. It is a large scale and costly operation mainly contracted out to public transport and private sector providers, although there is a small number of specially adapted vehicles for children with special needs. Reasonable steps are taken to ensure that costs are kept to a minimum and that user views are canvassed. Schools are generally satisfied with the reliability and punctuality of services and journey times are not excessive. Transport services for the authority as a whole are currently the subject of a Best Value review.

102. The LEA strategy for information management and ICT support has met the basic needs of schools and the education department but as yet lacks coherence. The disparate systems of the predecessor authorities, funding constraints and technical difficulties associated with the low population density and geography of the county have limited the development of electronic links suitable for large scale data capture.

103. The current position is one in which ICT systems for particular purposes within the education directorate are largely independent of each other and the use of electronic links with schools for data exchange is underdeveloped. Strategic planning of ICT uses and the management of information generally are also at an early stage with a range of separate plans covering particular aspects of development. A key weakness is that the plans do not address the resourcing implications involved. It is a stated aim of the LEA to ensure that a strategic plan for ICT and information management is developed and implemented and steps have been taken to take this task forward. Significant additional funding has recently been secured from the Single Regeneration Budget to develop the infrastructure and encourage community use.

104. The absence of a single strategic plan for Information Management and ICT support has not, so far, significantly hindered development because of the close day-to-day communication between leading officers and advisers. There is good general

awareness of each other's activities and a shared acceptance of key elements of good practice. However, this is a fragile basis for planning and coordination in the future. There is also the need to ensure that the accelerating development of information management and ICT use at individual school level does not lead to discontinuities which hinder joint working. This adds significantly to the complexity of the overall task.

105. Currently, the majority of schools use the same basic software for pupil data storage which provides a sound basis for the development of the LEA's central database and its data analysis activities. Similarly, software for accounting purposes is largely restricted to two systems. The LEA provides full user and technical support for schools' administrative systems together with more variable support for curriculum ICT. This has helpfully been brought together in a single section, the education administration systems support (EASS). There is close liaison with the IASPS on curricular ICT uses, but some uncertainty for schools about the role of advisers who have provided them with 'free' technical support in the past. Some schools are unhappy at now being asked to pay EASS for the same service.

Recommendations

In order that schools receive effective support:

- bring together, in consultation with schools, the existing development plans for information management and ICT into a single strategic plan which includes resourcing implications at school and LEA level.

In order to improve strategic management:

- give more focus to the procedures for effective evaluation of the impact of activities in the education directorate, particularly those in the EDP; and
- ensure that action plans for all education services have resource commitments clearly stated.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

106. The LEA's provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN) is sound but the strategic planning is unsatisfactory. The LEA's strategy for SEN is not fully articulated and in its current form the policy document does not begin to do justice to the commitment to inclusion which is emerging as a strong feature of the new authority. Much of the individual work that the LEA does to support pupils with special educational needs is good or better. The draft SEN policy document is poorly conceived and does not provide a sufficiently detailed vision of how the LEA intends to progress towards the fully integrated provision which is well within its grasp.

107. Consultation with schools and other stakeholders is inadequate because they are constrained from contributing to the important debate by insufficient detail and the lack of clear proposals in the document. It is not clear from this draft strategy how individual schools might align their own development plans to those of the LEA. Nor does it provide an accurate picture of how far the LEA has progressed. A number of very good developments are omitted, including the outcomes of the recent review of resourced provision, previously known as special education centres (SECs), in high schools and the planned review of SECs in primary schools.

108. Despite these shortcomings in the strategy statement, the LEA has made good progress towards a more inclusive education for all pupils. An innovative Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) inclusion project has been established and changes to the medical and behavioural support service (MBSS) put in place. A new school for pupils with EBD has been opened and there are proposed accommodation changes to one of the PRUs.

109. Only 0.7 per cent of Herefordshire pupils are in special schools and the LEA makes judicious use of independent and non-maintained special schools. The LEA has an extensive pattern of provision including resourced units (SECs) based in a number of primary and in all secondary schools, four special schools; three pupil referral units and a wide array of largely effective and well regarded services under the overall management of the head of children's and students services. These services make a major contribution to the LEA's SEN provision although this is not clearly reflected in the draft development plan. Whilst each support service shares their own databases at regular meetings there is a need for some rationalisation.

Statutory Obligations

110. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties with regard to special educational needs. The proportion of statements completed within the 18 week limit is 91 per cent, which compares favourably with other LEAs and is a major achievement given the low completion rate which the LEA had on transition two years earlier. Schools note an improvement in the quality of statements. LEA officers, educational psychologists and members of the support services are able to attend annual reviews that have particular importance either because of a need to change the provision or because they occur when the pupil is changing schools. Schools find the staff working in the SEN team to

be most helpful even when involved in complex and sometimes acrimonious disagreements regarding provision. The LEA's presentations to the SEN Tribunal have been well prepared.

111. Plans are well underway to extend the work of the Parent Partnership through the increased time allocation for the newly appointed parent partnership officer. A current recruitment drive intends to increase the number of independent parental supporters and a helpline is in place. Training courses are provided for befrienders and contacts are made with parent and disability groups in the county. Schools are not fully aware of these developments and the expectations of involvement this will place upon them. The SEN consortium was established as a forum of parents, voluntary groups and interested professionals to act as a sounding board and a useful means of linking parents with the LEA. Headteachers are invited to all meetings and some attend.

Improvement and value for money

112. The LEA's commitment to enhance SEN provision in mainstream schools and to maintain a small and effective special school section is understood in all schools. The budget for SEN is effectively used and provides satisfactory value for money.

113. Support for SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs) is well regarded. Training arrangements are highly valued as is advice and co-ordinating work by the adviser for SEN. The training of learning support assistants and whole staff training sessions have been well received. Membership of the EAZ for many of the schools has been additionally helpful in relation to pupil support and staff training. The new SENCO newsletter plus the network of EAZ SENCOs are valuable. Networking arrangements are in place for all schools to share good practice but vary in their structure. Schools are unclear of the details.

114. SEN Services to schools are well managed. In the main, the professional expertise of the staff, the practical nature of their advice and the speed and understanding shown are highly valued by both headteachers and SENCOs. However, much of the diagnostic assessment teaching at Stage 3 requires pupils to be withdrawn from the classroom and as a result the expertise of support staff is not being observed by mainstream teachers, thereby reducing the impact of the intervention in primary schools

115. For a small LEA there is a broad provision of support for pupils with physical and sensory needs, learning difficulties including dyslexia, serious medical needs or those presenting behaviour problems. This presents a logistical problem for school staff particularly when seeking support for pupils with multiple needs. Some schools reported a sense of frustration at having to deal with, in some cases, at least three separate services. Duplication and overlap in terms of Stage 3 assessment was seen by schools to be at worst a delaying tactic on the part of the LEA and at best an issue of coordination. Schools were also critical of the coverage by the educational psychology service, relating not to the quality of the work but to the impact of unavoidable staff absences on assessment processes.

116. The number of pupils who have statements attending the PRUs has reduced significantly. An increasing emphasis on intervention in mainstream schools is helping staff to become more skilful in tackling a wide range of behaviour problems. The quality of provision for pupils not attending school has been steadily improving.

117. A good development has been the integration project, which assists pupils who attend special schools to be included for part of the week in lessons in their neighbourhood primary schools. Similar work is now beginning for pupils of secondary age. The project has been well received by schools and staff training has been praised, as has the sensitive and professional way it has been introduced. Rapid progress has been made in a short period of time.

118. The LEA has been very cautious about introducing systems of moderation for resource allocation and challenging schools on these issues. Officers are correct in not wishing to have systems that will be an expensive way of eating up the very small budget. Possible alternatives for the allocation of funding based on the Code of Practice have yet to be explored in detail. The criteria for additional educational need (AEN) is based on SAT results which is an improvement on the use of free school meals.

119. Procedures for monitoring are under-developed. Currently, the LEA does not know whether the money delegated to schools for pupils with statements is being appropriately and effectively spent to meet the needs of those children. The decision to both delegate funds for pupils with statements to the schools and to replace the SECs in secondary schools so that they become resource bases means that this urgently needs attention.

Recommendations

In order to improve the policy for SEN:

- produce a comprehensive SEN strategic development plan that takes greater account of the good work already being undertaken towards more inclusive education, and provides a more meaningful basis for consultation with schools and other stakeholders.

In order to strengthen the management of SEN:

- establish effective means of monitoring the use of funds delegated for pupils with statements;
- consider the rationalisation of SEN services to schools at the point of contact, particularly for pupils with a range of special educational needs;
- ensure that a single support service database on pupils with SEN is included in the LEA's arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress; and
- circulate a short document to schools detailing all the various SENCO network arrangements.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

120. The LEA performs well in this area of work. Liaison with schools and other

agencies on the prediction of need and the planning of provision has generally been effective. Roll forecasts have been accurate. The LEA is facing a significant reduction in primary school numbers over the next five years but an increase in the secondary sector. This picture masks some areas of growth in the primary sector. Surplus places in both sectors are somewhat higher than the average for unitary authorities but the low density of population of the county is a key mitigating factor.

121. The significant number of small schools and relatively high costs of maintaining them is a key issue for planning in Herefordshire. The LEA has clear policies for the preferred minimum size of schools, the protection offered and the threshold for review. Some work is necessary to ensure that these policies dovetail precisely, but much careful thought is being given to these issues. The LEA has been active in reviewing its policy, and is about to embark on a review of a number of schools where the roll is below its recently increased policy threshold. Whilst the LEA correctly keeps such issues under close scrutiny and rightly reviews schools, it would be wrong to conclude that the closure of significant numbers of small schools should be the outcome or that such action is overdue. The particular circumstances and options in each case vary significantly and the potential savings likewise. Small schools are provided with appropriate financial and professional support.

122. The School Organisation Plan was produced on time after full consultation and provides a clear summary of projected need in the primary and secondary sectors, together with the action required. The plan is weaker in its coverage of special school provision and that made for children educated otherwise than at school. Given the statutory requirement for full time provision for such children from September 2002, it is particularly important that the associated accommodation needs are reflected in the Plan and dovetail with the behaviour support and SEN strategies.

School premises

123. Asset Management Planning (AMP) is good. The LEA is on schedule to meet the Government's requirements. Full condition surveys have been conducted of all school buildings, capacity data is up to date, and suitability assessments are nearly completed. Condition surveys have been well appreciated by schools who find the resulting reports to be both accurate and helpful in planning their own property management activities. Good advice has been provided to schools on carrying out suitability reviews and officers have participated in a number of reviews at schools' request.

124. The LEA has made it a high priority to address the backlog of repair, replacement and improvement needs in schools, and funding levels reflect this. Prior to delegation in 1999/2000 revenue spending on structural repairs and maintenance was well above the average for unitary authorities. The proportion of that budget spent on planned, rather than reactive, maintenance was at the recommended minimum level, suggesting that the situation overall was under reasonable control. Capital spending per pupil in 1999/2000 was at a comparatively very high level and this has been continued into the current year. Most of this money has been committed to meeting replacement and repair needs, but in the current year significant sums are also being spent on improvement works. If current levels of capital spending are sustained then repair and replacement needs can be met and further inroads made into the backlog of necessary improvement works. Schools, particularly in the primary sector, rightly think well of this

area of the LEA's work and are confident of its targeting of funds to meet priority needs.

125. The LEA provides a good service for property management. The professional support provided by the Council's property services section is well regarded by schools. There are regular reviews of customer satisfaction and reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the costs of fees and contracts compare satisfactorily with those incurred by other LEAs and the private sector. Client support for cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance is provided by the Council's environment directorate and is also well regarded by schools.

Admissions

126. The LEA has well managed admissions arrangements for both primary and secondary schools. There is close and harmonious working with the voluntary sector in this respect and the LEA co-ordinates a secondary transfer process which encompasses all local schools. An Admissions Forum with wide representation of interested groups was established in the summer of 1999.

127. The provision of information and advice to parents generally works well but some improvements could be made to the timing of the circulation of admissions literature. The timetables for admission to the main reception years are appropriate. The administration of admissions is efficient, as is the handling of appeals. Arrangements for the transfer to mainstream secondary schools of children with SEN statements are well designed to support inclusion. The choice of school available to the parents of such children is at least equal to that for others.

Provision of education other than at school

128. The LEA takes reasonable steps to ensure that it meet its statutory duty to provide suitable education for pupils who are not in school for reasons of illness, exclusion or otherwise. An appropriate range of provision is clearly outlined in the Behaviour Support Plan and includes the LEA's three PRUs, tuition at home and in hospitals. The service provides satisfactory value for money.

129. Herefordshire Council provides clear policy guidance and has appropriate monitoring procedures for parents and carers educating children at home including those with a statement of SEN. The home/school liaison officer (HSLO) discharges the LEA's statutory responsibilities with regard to children who are educated otherwise than at school.

130. The quality of the provision for pupils not attending schools has been steadily improving since unitary status and is now good. The LEA spends above comparable authorities in providing alternative provision in PRUs for the high number of pupils who, for medical reasons, will not or cannot attend school. Expenditure will rise in the short term, as the LEA is well on target to provide full time education for all pupils not in school by 2002. However, expenditure is expected to decrease in the medium term as the authority's inclusion policy takes effect and this is reflected in the forward planning of the medical and behavioural support service (MBSS). However, these expectations are not articulated or costed in the draft SEN policy document currently out for consultation.

131. The pupils who receive education otherwise are efficiently monitored and subject

to regular review by the MBSS and the education welfare service (EWS). One hundred and twenty-six pupils were receiving alternative educational provision at the time of the inspection. The parents of 46 of these pupils had elected to educate their children at home; 40 pupils had medical and emotional reasons for being out of school; 11 pupils had been excluded and were placed either in a PRU or the LEA's reintegration base for assessment. A range of strategies, including placement at a PRU, has been deployed with a further 29 pupils identified as persistent truants; all are closely monitored by officers in the LEA. Disaffected pupils excluded from school follow an alternative curriculum and this is having a positive impact on attainment levels in the PRU which caters for pupils at Key Stage 4.

132. Appropriate agreements ensure that excluded pupils are reintegrated, as far as possible, into neighbouring high schools. There are also good links with parents and carers of, for example phobic pupils, as well as with other services and agencies. Close liaison ensures that the progress of young people in public care who are excluded from school is communicated to the education liaison teachers, jointly funded by social services and education, who act as corporate parents on behalf of the Council.

Attendance

133. Support for attendance is good. The LEA takes reasonable steps to ensure that its statutory duties with regard to school attendance are met. Overall attendance rates are above the national average and levels of both authorised and unauthorised absence are below the national average. As a consequence, improving attendance is not an explicit EDP priority, but the contribution of the education welfare service (EWS) is rightly acknowledged in the activities to support under-achieving groups. The service also works closely with the IASPS in schools causing concern.

134. The LEA's strategy for promoting regular school attendance is clearly outlined in the Behaviour Support Plan. The work of the EWS is effectively targeted. The EWS employ a range of pro-active as well as remedial strategies to tackle persistent poor attenders, including warning letters to parents and the judicious use of prosecution as a last resort. The service is well regarded by schools in Herefordshire, particularly the high schools. The LEA encourages robust approaches for tackling pupils and their parents on the first day of absence. The EWS gives good support in these circumstances and this has been beneficial in the minority of schools where attendance rates are below local as well as national averages. Two schools have education welfare assistants piloting a range of new strategies in order to share good practice.

135. A Best Value review of the service is underway and on schedule to report to members by the end of this financial year. The size and cost of the EWS are lower than the average for unitary authorities.

Behaviour support

136. Herefordshire LEA provides effective support to schools and pupils in dealing with problems of behaviour. The LEA consulted effectively and widely on its Behaviour Support Plan which is a thorough, sound but dated document; events have moved on significantly since its production. The MBSS has been restructured and the management of the PRUs is now devolved. The LEA now adopts a more robust approach to tackling levels of permanent exclusion. Three high schools are

disproportionately represented in the exclusion figures and this has been addressed by a range of strategies. High schools appreciate the outreach and consultancy support from PRU staff when reintegrating pupils previously excluded from other schools. Nevertheless a small number of schools are unclear about the current arrangements for LEA support and the MBSS preference for working with only a small group of pupils at any one time.

137. The rates of secondary school permanent exclusions have fallen in the last year from a level which was above national averages. The LEA is on schedule to meet its target in 2002. Advice on exclusion procedures was rated satisfactory or better by primary schools, less positively by special schools and considered good or very good by high schools.

138. The work of the MBSS in schools is highly regarded, particularly its interventions with pupils at risk of exclusion and its work in schools causing concern. The service is well led and effectively managed. Support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties has improved. Support for improving pupils' behaviour was rated satisfactory by primary schools, but less positively by secondary and special schools, although a more varied picture emerged on the visits to schools.

139. Provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties has also improved significantly. The LEA has extended the range of provision it inherited, which included an unregistered centre where at present there are 37 pupils with statements, all educated full-time. The LEA established a new EBD special school in the city of Hereford in September 2000. At the same time the LEA is rationalising and improving provision in two PRUs during 2000-2001. In addition, changes have been made to the curriculum with the introduction of work related learning.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

140. The LEA takes reasonable steps to effectively discharge its functions for child protection effectively and spends more per pupil on functions relating to child protection than other comparable authorities. Overall provision gives satisfactory value for money. There is effective joint working with social services and appropriate training is provided in schools. The LEA works closely with the diocesan child protection officer.

141. Statutory obligations for health and safety are met through the work of a designated officer whose role is to audit, inspect and monitor provision as well as acting as a consultant offering advice and training to schools. All schools have been visited. Advice on health and safety in schools was rated satisfactory or better by primary and secondary, less so by special schools. Over 30 schools have taken part in a local Safe Schools initiative run jointly with the police.

142. The functions concerning the welfare of pupils are discharged in part by the education welfare service in schools. In addition, Herefordshire has 16 school nurses and each school has a named nurse. Health Visitors liaise closely with the School Health Nurse informing them of pertinent issues for children entering school. The education directorate works with Herefordshire Health Promotion to offer training opportunities to school nurses on the Healthy Schools Standard Framework. Since September 1999, the LEA has sought to meet its duty to ensure that school meals comply with DfEE draft regulations and guidelines on nutritional standards for school

lunches.

Children in public care

143. The LEA takes its statutory duties with regard to young people in public care very seriously. It has adopted an ambitious approach, which is already having a discernible and positive impact for young people and schools and provides good value for money. A member forum on looked after children was established by the new authority and meets regularly to review the effectiveness of the Council's corporate parenting arrangements. The Council discharges its role as corporate parent through the appointment of two education liaison teachers (ELTs) who act as advocates on behalf of young people in their interactions with a range of agencies, including schools. These appointments are jointly funded by education and social services, as outlined in the Quality Protects Management Action Plan, and go some way to meeting the objectives outlined in a draft joint policy statement which has been produced for consultation.

144. Good provision is made to support the educational attainment of the 153 young people of school age in public care in the county. Of those 42 are educated outside the county. There is a discrete database administered by the ELTs. Since the EDP attainment targets were set, a more accurate profile of local young people in public care has emerged. For example, over 50 per cent of looked after children have a statement of SEN. The ELTs work with the IASPS on individual pupil targets that are at least in line with those of their peers. Targets for improvement in the attainment of young people in public care are monitored by the ELTs who attend annual reviews and attend school meetings, where appropriate.

145. Schools are well advised on their responsibilities and each school has appointed a designated teacher to oversee the educational progress of looked after children; the majority are placed with foster parents in Herefordshire. Training for designated teachers has been provided and the statutory guidance issued to schools. Eight of the schools visited had young people in public care on their roll; all spoke highly of the multi-agency support provided by the LEA and the improving relationship with social services.

146. A growing number of private providers based in the county provide residential care for pupils referred from other local authorities. Not all the children located in such provision are on the roll of local schools and for the LEA liaison with their host authorities is not always effective. These matters have been taken up with the DfEE.

Gifted and talented children

147. Action to increase the challenge and attainment for more able pupils is an EDP priority. The LEA has a philosophy with appropriately wide interpretations of this objective, which include developing a range of talents by providing activities that enrich pupils' learning and development, particularly for those in disadvantaged areas. Some good progress has been made with the EDP activities. Data on higher performance has been circulated to schools, advice and training have been available for whole school staff development, able pupil coordinators, and local school clusters. The LEA has provided funding for able pupil projects in mathematics and science in one secondary and one primary school and ASTs have given effective revision classes for high attainers and gifted pupils.

148. Future plans are clear and will extend the work into modern foreign languages produce guidance for schools on policy development and appropriate strategies for teachers.

Ethnic minority children including Travellers

149. Support for minority ethnic pupils is satisfactory overall, although there are strengths and weaknesses. A very small percentage of the LEA's pupils are from ethnic minority groups and they are scattered across the county.

150. Support for Traveller children, by far the largest group, is good. Herefordshire has a long history of Travellers and is a founder member of the West Midlands consortium education service for travelling children (WMCESTC). The service currently supports ten children in pre-school settings and a further 166 children in 40 schools. Support is well organised and effective; a recent HMI inspection judged the service to provide excellent value for money. The LEA works closely with the service to ensure a coordinated, consistent approach. The attainment, progress and attendance of individuals are carefully monitored. Tracking indicates good progress for those pupils who attend regularly. Attendance levels compare favourably with other LEAs in the consortium and is impressive at secondary level.

151. Schools in the survey rated the LEA's support for meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils as satisfactory. However there has been insufficient action to identify the needs of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or to monitor their progress. There is insufficient recognition in the EDP of their needs or that isolation might be an issue. Schools are advised to monitor the progress and attainment of all pupils from ethnic minorities, but no data is held centrally to enable the LEA to substantiate its view that "no groups are at risk of under achievement other than Traveller children". The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) is small but growing. In December 1999, 21 of the 101 pupils identified received support in 15 schools. The LEA has not met its target to collect comprehensive data on all ethnic minority pupils by December 2000. It plans to address this unsatisfactory situation but not until September 2001.

Social exclusion

152. The council has established anti-poverty and social inclusion as a key theme. The LEA has a strong commitment to cross departmental and multi-agency working in order to prevent social exclusion, including a range of effective initiatives which are helping schools reduce the risk of disaffection among pupils. Both the EDP and BSP define strategies and targets to improve the life chances of vulnerable groups. Social inclusion is a core purpose of the work of the IASPS and almost every area of the EAZ's action plan impinges directly on EDP priority 5, focusing on the identification, inclusion and successful integration of categories of vulnerable pupils into the education system. The high quality work of the EYDCP provides a secure platform from which to extend inclusion.

153. The LEA has not given a sufficiently high priority to promoting effective measures to combat racism. The Council has developed a policy on equal opportunities and has appointed a race equality officer. However, senior education officers have not

communicated a clear and co-ordinated strategy to schools in order to build on these developments. The LEA has not established appropriate procedures to monitor incidents of racial harassment in schools, nor has it done enough to develop other strategies to encourage tolerance.

154. The response to the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has been slow. Awareness-raising workshops have been held for all staff in the Education Directorate, for headteachers, governors and NQTs. External consultants have been commissioned to produce guidance to schools on developing an equal opportunities policy and on recording racist incidents, but the present time frame conveys neither importance nor urgency.

155. Provision for children in public care is good, and exclusions have reduced significantly. Attendance amongst vulnerable groups, such as Traveller children, is above average when compared with other LEAs in the WMCESTC. Data is not yet collected on pupils from other minority ethnic backgrounds, including mixed heritage children. Although the LEA is using the arts and religious education curriculum to give pupils access to a wider range of cultures and beliefs, it has some way to go in fitting all its young people to play a full part in a multi-racial society.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision for specific groups of pupils:

- revise the School Organisation Plan to include coverage of how the accommodation needs of children requiring provision otherwise than at school will be met;
- hasten the establishment of a centrally held database on the attainment of ethnic minority pupils including those from mixed heritage, to ensure that the broader educational needs of these children, in addition to EAL, are met;
- develop strategies to prevent and address racism, and urgently produce guidance to schools on the recording and reporting of racial incidents with a database of the current situation; and
- implement as soon as possible a cohesive policy and strategy on social inclusion, including effective procedures to counter racism and to actively promote understanding and tolerance of other cultures, values and beliefs.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1 : THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve strategic planning:

- strengthen the EDP so that targets and success criteria enable improved evaluation of the impact of the plan's activities.

In order to improve the overall budget strategy:

- develop a budget strategy for the medium-term and require each main service area to develop plans which are consistent with it;
- revise the education business performance plan to incorporate the resource requirements for each area of activity and indicate how these resources will be secured; and
- share more clearly with schools the models of educational need which underpin the LEA's funding formula.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to raise standards:

- sharpen the strategy for developing ICT across the curriculum, in order to target identified weaknesses by increasing the focus on teaching and ensuring that staff have the skills to implement it successfully;
- hasten the development of an Intranet and county web site to encourage professional networking; and
- plan further support for high schools to address the gap in the performance of girls and boys in English at Key Stage 3.

In order to improve LEA monitoring:

- further develop the use of data for school monitoring, and reduce visits to schools in line with the Code of Practice.

In order to improve the effectiveness of support to schools with serious weaknesses or causing concerns, steps should be taken to:

- develop and improve the procedures for identifying schools causing concern so that the grade criteria have sufficient detail and are fully understood by schools;
- take prompt action to support schools causing concern and those with serious weaknesses, and ensure that schools take responsibility for their development as self evaluating and autonomous organisations;

In order to improve the effectiveness of management:

- implement a management development strategy for middle managers in high schools; and
- clarify for schools the processes used to identify good practice both in the LEA and the EAZ, and ensure that links are made for its dissemination;

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order that schools receive effective support;

- bring together, in consultation with schools, the existing development plans for information management and ICT into a single strategic plan which includes resourcing implications at school and LEA level.

In order to improve strategic management:

- give more focus to the procedures for effective evaluation of the impact of activities in the education directorate, particularly those in the EDP; and
- ensure that the action plans for all education services have resource commitments clearly stated.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

In order to improve the policy for SEN:

- produce a comprehensive SEN strategic development plan that takes greater account of the good work already being undertaken towards more inclusive education, and provides a more meaningful basis for consultation with schools and other stakeholders.

In order to strengthen the management of SEN:

- establish effective means of monitoring the use of funds delegated for pupils with statements;
- consider the rationalisation of SEN services to schools at the point of contact, particularly for pupils with a range of special educational needs;
- ensure that a single support service database on pupils with SEN is included in the LEA's arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress; and
- circulate a short document to schools detailing all the various SENCO network arrangements.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve the provision for specific groups of pupils:

- revise the School Organisation Plan to include coverage of how the accommodation needs of children requiring provision otherwise than at school will be met;
- hasten the establishment of a centrally held database on the attainment of ethnic minority pupils including those from mixed heritage, to ensure that the broader educational needs of these children, in addition to EAL, are met;
- develop strategies to prevent and address racism, and urgently produce guidance to schools on the recording and reporting of racial incidents with a database of the current situation; and
- implement, as soon as possible, a cohesive policy and strategy on social inclusion, including effective procedures to counter racism and to actively promote understanding and tolerance of other cultures, values and beliefs.

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