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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of its work was circulated to all of the LEA's schools, including pupil referral units (PRUs). The response rate was 81 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one early years centre, one PRU, 11 primary, three special and four secondary schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other key staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. Evidence from other HMI visits to schools in the LEA was also included. The inspection considered whether the support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in schools, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Hampshire County Council serves a prosperous county, with relatively little socio-economic disadvantage. Pupils make progress in line with or above national rates and achieve good standards at all key stages.

5. Hampshire is a good and improving LEA. Established structures and systems are supported by a measured willingness to take on new approaches. Political leadership is strong and procedures for accountability are well established. Leadership overall is consistent, purposeful and challenging. Schools are adequately resourced and there is good corporate support for the education service. Members have a clear view of their strategic role in promoting autonomous schools.

6. The LEA has been successful in establishing an effective and productive partnership with schools. Services have a strong customer focus, and most are of a consistently good quality and responsive to schools' needs. The LEA is well regarded by headteachers and governors.

7. The LEA's capacity to plan and to prioritise its support for schools is well established and strong. Services contributing to school improvement are focused and well organised. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is a poor document, but this seems to be an anomaly. The thoroughness and effectiveness of the various services compensate for the plan's limitations, with service evaluations playing an important role in identifying the extent to which EDP activities contribute to school improvement.

8. Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good. The LEA has also been successful in sharply reducing permanent exclusions.

9. The vast majority of functions are carried out well and the following are particularly effective:

- support for the national numeracy strategy in primary schools;
- support for information and communication technology (ICT) in the curriculum;
- support for schools in special measures;
- support for governors;
- support for early years;
- leadership of the education service;
- financial management;
- personnel management;
- support for pupils with special educational needs; and
- supply of school places.

10. A few functions are not performed adequately. Although few in number, they are important. The LEA is aware of them and in the case of the literacy strategy has already taken some remedial action. They are:

- preparation of the EDP;
- management of the national literacy strategy; and
- support for attendance.

11. The LEA has a proven record in managing its affairs effectively while being open to suggestions for further improvement. There can be every confidence that the LEA will act promptly and decisively in addressing the comparatively few recommendations in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Hampshire LEA serves a population of over 1.2 million, of whom a small minority is of minority ethnic origin. The unemployment level is consistently below the national average. Large parts of the county are rural and most of the population lives in large towns.

13. In January 2000, there were 175,853 pupils in the LEA's schools. Of the 15,103 children living within the authority aged under-five, over 94 per cent were attending primary schools. A further 823 children aged under four were in nursery schools. The number of pupils in primary schools peaked in 1998/99, although those in secondary schools are continuing to rise and are due to peak in 2003/2004.

14. Educational disadvantage, expressed as the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, is below the national average for primary schools, and well below for secondary. Hampshire is a prosperous county, with only 19 of its 230 wards in the most deprived quartile nationally. The proportion of adults in social class 1 or 2 is well above the national level and statistical neighbours. From time to time, many schools are affected by pupil mobility, mainly resulting from the large military presence in the county. The proportion of pupils with statements for special educational needs is below average for both primary and secondary.

15. Hampshire has 551 schools. In January 2001, these comprised:

SCHOOL TYPE	NUMBER
Nursery	2
Primary: Infant	133
Primary: Junior	119
Primary: All-age	186
Secondary: 11-16	60
Secondary: 11-18	11
Special	30
Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)	10

Of the total of 509 primary/secondary schools, 358 are community, 21 are foundation, 55 voluntary aided, and 75 voluntary controlled. There are no single sex schools. None of the primary and secondary schools selects pupils by ability.

Performance

16. Attainment on entry is above statistical neighbours and national. In 2000, standards of attainment in national tests at all key stages were above

the national average. At Key Stages 1 and 2, standards were also above the average of statistical neighbours. At Key Stage 3 and 4, standards were in line with statistical neighbours.

17. Over the last three years, improvement in the percentages of pupils achieving level 4 at Key Stage 2 and five grades A*-C at GCSE has been in line with statistical neighbours. Progress of pupils between Key Stages 1 and 2 and 2 and 3 is in line with that nationally. Between Key Stages 3 and 4, pupil progress is above the national average.

18. Recent OFSTED data show that the percentage of primary schools judged good or very good is broadly in line with the average nationally and for statistical neighbours. Corresponding data show the percentage of secondary schools judged good or very good to be above the national average and broadly in line with statistical neighbours.

19. Attendance is well above national levels in primary schools, above average in secondary and has been identified by OFSTED as a strength in both phases. Unauthorised absence in primary and secondary schools is in line with national levels. Permanent exclusion rates in primary and secondary schools are in line with national figures.

Funding

20. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil for school provision is close to the average for English counties. Education spending has been consistently above the SSA level since local government reorganisation, but the difference declined significantly between 1997/98 and 1998/99. For the last two years, increases in education SSA have been passed on fully to schools.

21. The council is only now beginning to develop a medium term financial plan. However, the sound financial standing of the council and the commitment to passing on education SSA have provided useful guidance and stability for the preparation of the education budget. Schools are beginning to feel the benefit of this in planning their own spending.

22. Arrangements for developing bids for grant aid and co-ordinating submissions are good. The relatively advantaged nature of the local population has meant that only modest benefit has been gained from some government grant regimes. However, there has been significant success in attracting Lottery grant to improve school sports facilities. Information and advice for schools on the preparation of individual bids for external funding is satisfactory.

23. Council capital spending in recent years has regularly included significant contributions from its revenue budget as well as the use of capital

receipts. The availability of such funds has meant that the possibility of PFI funding has not yet had to be pursued to support education.

Council structure

24. The Conservative group controls the council and its members chair all committees. Political leadership is strong and relations with officers are focused, clearly defined and built on mutual trust. Arrangements for running the council are based on traditional committee structures and, although a future cabinet model is being considered, there is very little appetite for modernisation.

25. Hampshire is divided into seven geographical areas linked to four local offices. The LEA has four branches:

- Standards and improvement;
- Inclusion;
- School and community;
- Resources and planning.

Each is headed by an assistant county education officer (ACEO), responsible to the county education officer (CEO). Together, the CEO and the ACEOs comprise the education department management team (EDMT). The EDMT meets fortnightly, its meetings arranged to closely follow meetings of corporate management team.

The Education Development Plan

26. The EDP was approved for three years. It has been updated for 2000/2001, to include some new activities. The plan has seven priorities:

- providing challenge and support for all schools;
- reducing disaffection and exclusions;
- helping to create the conditions for school improvement;
- improving the quality of teaching;
- improving leadership, management and governance;
- raising standards of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology; and
- raising standards through the dissemination of effective practice.

27. The plan is a poor document. It does not make clear how the priorities were derived from an analysis of need and audit of school performance. There is no analysis of school or pupil performance by area, gender nor ethnicity, and no indication of any attempt to compensate, for example, for pupil mobility. References to performance management and monitoring by members are vague. Little attempt is made to link with other LEA and

corporate plans and there are few details on the management arrangements. Although costings are provided for each activity, there is no explanation as to how the figures are derived.

28. Despite the above criticisms, the evidence given for including priorities in the plan, although incomplete, is reasonably persuasive. The plan's limitations are also compensated for by other planning mechanisms and by the overall robustness underpinning much of the LEA's activity. Resourcing implications have been considered in reasonable detail and total costings are less than the average for statistical neighbours.

29. Consultation on the plan itself was adequate and has been supplemented by detailed planning of activities by services in close consultation with schools. In practice, the activities are typically well organised and undertaken with a clear focus on securing actual improvement. Schools especially value the various projects developed by the LEA.

30. The targets in the EDP are challenging and, if achieved through to 2002, would represent considerable improvement over pre-1999 levels. Currently, for Key Stage 2 literacy, the aggregated school targets for 2002 are 7 per cent below that of the LEA. Despite this, both the LEA's 2000 targets for English and mathematics were achieved. At 16+, the target for the average points score was also achieved. For five grades A*-C at GCSE, however, although improvement on the 1999 figure exceeded that of statistical neighbours, the target for 2000 was just missed. The 2000 targets for permanent exclusions were achieved.

31. The vagueness of the original criteria has hampered evaluation and has made it difficult for the CEO and members to judge the extent to which the plan as a whole is providing value for money. The CEO's report on the LEA's evaluation of the EDP during 1999/2000 was very positive, arguing that progress had been made in many areas. At the time of the inspection, the LEA was actively collecting data to measure schools' improvement over the last year. This was being carried out systematically, with service evaluations playing an important role in identifying the extent to which the various EDP activities had contributed to the improvements. These developments are to be welcomed and should help members to make better value for money judgements. Nevertheless, tighter EDP performance indicators are also still needed.

Allocation of resources to priorities

32. The LEA approach to allocating resources to priorities is good. There have only been relatively modest changes in recent years but these can clearly be seen to reflect key policy priorities. A major factor limiting the ability to target growth money on new priorities has been the rise in spending on home to school transport and on provision for children with statements of

SEN. Of these, in budgetary terms the former is the more significant. In both cases, there have been budget increases and overspends. Steps have been taken to address the difficulties and these are explored in the relevant sections below. Overall, however, the LEA's actions and plans are sound.

33. Consultation on the education budget is good. Headteacher and governor representatives have the opportunity to discuss proposals at a formative stage and there is confidence on their part in the openness of dialogue.

34. Overall spending on schools is as shown below:

	Hampshire	English counties	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£2,113	£2,124	£2,294
Secondary Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£2,730	£2,793	£2,987

Spending on primary schools is below, but close to, the English counties average. Spending on secondary schools is somewhat further below, but comparisons are difficult due to the relatively low number of sixth form pupils. Provision for pupils aged 11-15 is closer to average.

35. The proportion of the LSB delegated to schools in 2000/2001 is relatively high (83.8 per cent of LSB) compared to the average for English counties (81.4 per cent). Centrally controlled budgets for statutory and regulatory duties and school improvement are somewhat below the English counties average. Arrangements for charging the costs of central services to the education budget are satisfactory.

36. Delegated funding for Hampshire primary and secondary schools reflects the comparatively high proportion of the budget delegated to schools:

	Hampshire	English counties	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget ISB per pupil	£1,742	£1,627	£1,734
Secondary Local Schools Budget ISB per pupil	£2,362	£2,297	£2,433

37. The LEA's funding formula still essentially reflects the pattern of expenditure immediately prior to the start of local management of schools (LMS). Some years ago the LEA undertook, with school representatives, a quite comprehensive analysis of school spending needs. Whilst it has felt unable to make significant progress towards acting on the findings, it has continued to update its funding models and these have guided the allocation

of available budgetary growth. The use of comparative pupil performance data has also informed the allocation of growth funding.

38. A distinguishing feature of the funding formula is that much of the funding for non-statemented SEN is distributed on the basis of an audit of special needs in each school. The collection and moderation of data works effectively and enables the LEA to target resourcing more precisely in relation to need. This system has been extended to the allocation of resources ("Step 3" funding) to support a significant proportion of children who would previously have had a statement. This leads to savings on professional and administrative time that would otherwise have been spent on the full assessment process.

Best Value

39. The LEA's arrangements for conducting Best Value reviews are good. Comprehensive and good quality guidance for those conducting reviews has been produced and there is particular emphasis on ensuring robust challenge. 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. The council has accepted the auditor's recommendation that it strengthen its systems for producing performance indicators and targets. Only one Best Value review has so far been completed within the education service. This covered admissions and is reported on in the relevant section below.

40. Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- in the planned revision of the EDP, relate priorities and activities more precisely to the audit of needs; and
- further raise members' capacity to identify the extent to which the EDP is providing value for money, by sharpening the performance indicators used to evaluate the effectiveness of EDP activities.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

41. Strategic management, support for pupils with SEN and arrangements for pupil access enhance the LEA's school improvement work in most, but not all, respects.

42. Political leadership is strong and the LEA approach to allocating resources to priorities is good. Corporate understanding of the place of the education service is good and elected members have a clear view of their strategic role in the context of autonomous schools. There is a strong partnership with the police and the LEA has played a pivotal role in setting up the Education Action Zone (EAZ) in Leigh Park. Management services are of consistently high quality and tailored to schools' needs. There are comprehensive and effective arrangements for consultation with schools on service planning and services have a strong customer focus.

43. Support for pupils with SEN is good, although for some schools more discussion is needed about the future shape of special education across the county, in particular to support pupils with complex behaviour needs.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

44. Monitoring, challenge, intervention in and support for schools are carried out satisfactorily and in some respects well. The functions are well understood by schools and standards are rising. Recent LEA data show that of 86 schools causing concern supported in the current year, 43 no longer need support.

45. The categorisation of schools is an annual process and forms an effective basis for differentiated support. This triggers differences in allocation of the Standard Fund improvement grant - the latter only available to a school following agreement on an action plan. The circumstances under which the LEA will intervene in schools are clearly defined according to the various school categories.

46. Support does not, however, totally meet the criterion of intervention in inverse proportion to success. Even excellent schools are offered three visits per year, one of which is compulsory and takes the form of an annual review. While the LEA plans to reduce these visits to only one per year from April 2001, it has not yet embraced the notion that programmed visiting of the best-led schools is unnecessary.

47. Hampshire inspection and advisory service (HIAS) is the main service responsible for delivering the functions. It is one of the largest such services in the country. It has worked as a business unit for the last seven years, and

currently gains 43 per cent of its income from schools. The service level agreement (SLA) with schools is clear and flexible, and it is open to schools to purchase further support outside the SLA, although there is little evidence of the LEA providing guidance on providers other than itself. Deployment is rarely less than sufficient to meet schools' needs.

48. HIAS has available to it an enviable range and quantity of expertise. To an unusual extent, advisers are able to work within their phase and curricular specialisms, and this is a factor underpinning the high regard in which they are held in schools. As usual, the key role is that of the attached inspector (AI), which is well understood by schools and performed well. Advisers' records of visits are very thorough and provide an appropriate number of clear points for action to assist governors and headteachers in planning for improvement. Notes of visit are not, however, produced in every case and, particularly where there are leadership and management issues, this can hamper the work of governors in monitoring progress.

49. Support from subject inspectors is good and in the rare instances where it is not, schools are quick to make their feelings known and the department responds quickly. Where there is insufficient capacity, for example in religious education, this is made good by seconded consultancy work provided by serving teachers. Extensive and effective use has been made of acting headteachers, although there is scope to make the strategy for recruiting these more transparent and to improve the support they receive, especially where they later revert to deputy headships. A start has been made in recruiting part-time 'associate' headteachers and plans are in place with a business partner to extend this to a wider range of other posts.

50. HIAS promotes a clear and shared vision of school improvement and, is well led and efficiently run. A system of performance review seeks to match personal performance and targets with the policy objectives of the service.

51. Service evaluation procedures rely almost exclusively on perception surveys and the collection of schools' views by other means. While this is essential, and the practice of feeding back to schools an analysis of their views is positive, the overall approach is not sufficient. Little evidence was seen of rigorous self-assessment against service standards and no evidence was found of benchmarking against other similar services. Overall, however, HIAS provides an effective service at reasonable cost and good value for money.

52. Area school improvement managers (ASIMs) provide a useful role in overseeing and co-ordinating support for schools locally. Key functions include moderating the categorisation process, reviewing support plans and chairing task groups for schools causing concern, monitoring the coherence of support provided by the various LEA services, supporting new

headteachers and chairs of governors and the performance management of attached advisers. The ASIMs perform these functions well.

The use of performance data

53. The LEA's provision of data to mainstream schools is sound and improving. The comparative data provided to help set each school's performance in a local context are highly valued by schools. At primary level, all data are sensibly shared openly. In contrast at secondary level, for example, when subject data are shared, school identities are kept anonymous. This inhibits the dissemination of good practice. Support to special schools is good: since 1999, pupil assessment data have been collected and analysed by the LEA and shared with schools.

54. LEA support for target setting has strengths. The quality of guidance is sound and there has been appropriate training for governing bodies. In most schools this has been further enhanced by good support from the AI. However, in a significant minority of schools the target setting discussion was not sufficiently challenging and 2002 targets, for example for Key stage 2 literacy, were set too low. The LEA is now taking steps to give formal notification to such schools that the targets set should be raised.

55. The LEA provides value-added analyses to all primary schools and to two-thirds of secondary schools. In the Andover area, considerable and useful work has also been done on value-added projections. Effective use is made of 'p-scales' to measure value-added for SEN pupils. Pupil data are not held centrally and the transfer to secondary schools of Key Stage 2 data is done manually - often resulting in its late arrival hampering effective use. Recent national initiatives and new software should in future improve the quality of support in this area.

56. The LEA's use of data in identifying under-achieving departments in secondary schools is well established and has enabled HIAS to target useful support to help address the weaknesses. Analysis shows subsequent improvements in pupils' performances at GCSE in the great majority of these departments.

Support for literacy

57. The management of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been unsatisfactory. The LEA did not pursue early implementation of the NLS with sufficient drive and enthusiasm. Although the LEA has taken steps to remedy the position and there are now clear signs of improvement, some weaknesses remain.

58. Standards are above national averages at all key stages. At Key Stage 2, in 2000, 78 per cent of pupils attained level 4 and above. This represents

an 8 per cent increase since 1998, but is below the national improvement rate of 10 per cent. The overall LEA improvement (2 per cent) was less than half the national rate (4.6 per cent). The LEA has much to do in order to attain its very challenging target of 88 per cent for the year 2002.

59. The implementation of NLS had a poor start. Initially, there was insufficient oversight of the NLS line manager by senior management, although this has been remedied since September 2000. Other recent improvements include the allocation of an English inspector to co-ordinate the work of the consultants. Some weaknesses, however, remain. For example, evaluation of the impact of initiatives is weak and is not related back to success criteria identified in the EDP. The DfEE initially rejected the LEA's literacy plan, but the new version for 2001-2 has recently received verbal approval.

60. AIs negotiate literacy targets with schools and frequently monitor the quality of the teaching of literacy. English inspectors support schools causing concern while consultants support other designated schools. The target setting process for literacy has not been sufficiently rigorous. The schools aggregated target for 2002 is 7 per cent below the LEA target. Collaboration between the English team and AIs in supporting individual schools is poorly planned. The programme of training for AIs has not included any updates on the NLS over the last 18 months, although further training is planned for April 2001.

61. Schools value the work of consultants and inspectors. However, there has been considerable slippage over the implementation of the programme for leading literacy teachers. Progress in literacy development has also been slowed by long-term absences of key staff. The team is now up to full complement, with planned expansion of another primary consultant, a sixth inspector and three secondary literacy consultants in April 2001.

62. In 1999-2000, the criteria for selecting schools for intensive support were inappropriate. As a result, some schools that should have received light touch support under the principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success received the extra support. The support was also not very effective. At Key Stage 2, improvements at level 4 in the 60 schools receiving the support were no better on average than in the schools that did not receive it.

63. Support for secondary schools is sound. Support has been effectively targeted at weak departments and at schools designated as causing concern. Results at Key Stage 3 have fallen slightly over the last three years and much work remains to be done. Networking to support subject managers is weak, although schools that buy into the annual heads of department conference report that it is useful.

Support for numeracy

64. Support for numeracy is good in primary and special schools and the LEA is implementing the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) effectively. Progress in raising pupils' attainment at Key Stage 2 has been good. The proportion of pupils gaining level 4 and above increased by 12 per cent between 1998 and 2000. In 2000, 77 per cent of Year 6 pupils attained the level; in line with both the LEA target and the aggregate level for all schools. As a result, the LEA is well placed to meet its 2002 target of 82 per cent.

65. The LEA's work in implementing the NNS has been well received by schools. The LEA's eight numeracy consultants and five mathematics inspectors are well regarded and have shown themselves to be flexible in meeting the needs of schools. The consultants are managed effectively by one of the county's five mathematics inspectors.

66. The development of leading mathematics teachers (LMTs) is a priority both in the EDP and in the LEA's mathematics action plan. The number of LMTs has been increased to 50 this year and the LEA has tightened its selection procedures. The work of LMTs is valued by schools.

67. The line manager provides good leadership and management. The mathematics strategic plan for 2000-01 is thorough and is suitably linked to the EDP. Support to primary schools is well targeted and an attempt has been made to assess the impact of this work. Links between AIs and the mathematics team could be stronger, particularly important when supporting schools with weak leadership.

68. Support for secondary schools is sound. Schools have valued the training on NNS implementation at Key Stage 3. The LEA targets its support appropriately, effectively focusing on schools causing concern and weak departments. Over the last three years, results in national tests at Key Stage 3 have improved in line with statistical neighbours and those nationally. Analysis by the LEA shows that in supported schools GCSE results have improved faster than national rates. The LEA is currently appointing three consultants to enhance support for secondary schools. The mathematics team actively encourages networking and provides good support for 22 local groups of primary and secondary subject managers.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

69. Support for ICT is very good. The LEA has clear strategies; the implementation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) has been well managed and the training for New Opportunities Fund (NOF) is matched successfully to schools' development needs.

70. The central support team is made up of six able and experienced inspectors/advisers. Additional support for primary schools is also available from 30 good classroom practitioners. Subject-related NOF training is managed by subject advisers, who also provide materials for a website. Together, the support links well to provide a comprehensive, cohesive package for ICT across the curriculum.

71. The LEA contributes to the NOF training and schools report that the quality of training is good. The take-up of the courses is good, with approximately 80 per cent of teachers being trained against a national average of 50 per cent. The LEA is also well placed to meet DfEE 2002 targets for the NGfL with, for example, all schools connected to the Internet and with networked Internet access to support management and administration. The LEA also gives advice on other training providers.

72. The LEA has a good knowledge of the quality of ICT in its schools. Analysis of OFSTED data indicates that the good provision is reflected in pupils' ICT skills being developed at greater than the national rate. The EDP commits the LEA to improving standards and progress at ICT at Key Stage 4. A key strategy is the successful use of a 'Key Skills' project now in its third year, which is having a significant impact in the schools. By April 2000, 45 schools were signed up to the initiative and the number of Year 11 pupils gaining a skills qualification in ICT has risen from 2000 to over 6000 over the last eighteen months.

Support for schools causing concern or likely to do so

73. Support for schools in special measures is good. Twenty-three schools have been judged to require special measures since 1993. Of these, nine remain subject to special measures, 12 have made the requisite improvement within the expected two years and two have closed. For each one, a task group chaired by an ASIM oversees support. Where appropriate, diocesan inspectors form part of the task group. Reports from the task group are given termly to the schools monitoring sub-committee, although details of the evaluation are not routinely shared with the schools and this is a weakness. The LEA has acted decisively when needed, withdrawing financial delegation in two schools and appointing additional governors in 16 others. The quality of the LEA action plans is almost always good. Two have required amendment and this was speedily done.

74. Support for schools judged to have serious weaknesses is now good. Previously, this was not the case. Two schools in serious weaknesses did not make sufficient progress and were placed in special measures in 1998 and 1999 respectively. However, in 2000 only two schools were judged to require special measures, compared to seven in each of the previous two years. This reflects the sharper focus and increased effectiveness of LEA support.

75. Support for schools identified by the LEA as causing concern is a mix of strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring is sound and it is clear which categories trigger additional support. However, the criteria have been too narrow. For example, an LEA review prior to an OFSTED inspection in 1999 failed to identify important difficulties. The school was subsequently placed in special measures. The LEA has since tightened its procedures. It now provides better information to governing bodies about its concerns, although exceptions to this policy were noted during school visits and in discussions with headteachers.

Support for school management

76. LEA support for school management has significant strengths, but also a few weaknesses. The main element of the support is through the AI and, in the great majority of cases, this is effective. A major strength has been the help and guidance given to the schools to assist the monitoring of teaching and learning. Where monitoring has identified weak teaching, the AI has linked appropriately with the personnel department to provide very good support, including in handling of competency procedures.

77. Support for school self-evaluation is being put in place, although the LEA has been slow to develop its strategy. Guidance has recently been issued to secondary schools and prompts have been drawn up to help primary schools self-review. A training programme is now being put in place, appropriately targeting schools where a clear need has been identified.

78. The LEA intervenes decisively and appropriately when leadership and management issues are identified in schools. It relies heavily on the knowledge of schools acquired by AIs and has been successful in working with a number of governing bodies to remove weak headteachers. There is, however, a perception among some secondary headteachers that judgements of AIs on the quality of school leadership lack consistency and that this stems from the lack of senior management expertise of some inspectors.

79. The LEA supports the process of headteacher development, but does not itself provide a large programme of training. Where a headteacher's skills need developing, support is provided in line with the EDP. The LEA also encourages the take-up of national qualifications, such as those for prospective and serving headteachers (NPQH and LPSH). Annual headteacher conferences are highly valued and there is a strong tradition in the county of peer support. Analysis of OFSTED reports shows that improvement in leadership between first and second cycle inspections is above the rate nationally.

80. Support for the appointment of headteachers is good. Induction courses are rated highly, although there is some dissatisfaction with the LEA's inability to identify suitable mentors. Links among cohorts of new headteachers, particularly in the primary sector, are encouraged. In this context, however, new headteachers of special schools can feel isolated.

81. Support for middle managers and deputy headteachers is sound. The LEA supports, for example, the 'Challenge to Headship' programme for heads and deputies in the west of the county. In secondary schools, most subjects have useful networks for heads of departments. The provision for primary subject co-ordinators, however, is uneven.

82. Support for newly qualified teachers (NQT) is sound in most respects and the partnership between schools and the LEA works particularly well. The training offered does not fully take into account the range of previous experience and knowledge of NQTs, although the induction pack provided is good.

Support for governance

83. Support for governors is very good. Governors are kept well informed about relevant legislation and local developments through newsletters, consultation documents and via the HANTSNET. There is an effective forum where governors can meet LEA officers and members. These meetings are synchronised with area meetings of governors to enable the wider views on issues to be canvassed. A consequence of termly meetings, however, is that there can be a considerable period between the point at which issues rise from grass roots level and the time outcomes can be fed back.

84. Schools consistently report that the support provided by the governors support unit (GSU) is excellent. Support ranges from good training courses for new and experienced governors through whole school governing body training to speedy and effective responses to queries from individuals. The GSU is well led, although at times the high level of demand does put considerable pressure on the small team. The GSU has a good business plan, progress against which is rigorously monitored by a service review group. A sound clerking service has recently been introduced and its use by schools is growing.

85. The LEA is successfully promoting governor recruitment. There is still a 10 per cent shortage of governors, but only 28 of these are for LEA governors and long-standing vacancies have been cut from 788 to 384 in the last year. Appropriately, priority is given to finding governors where there are long-standing vacancies or there are concerns about a school. The EDP sets very challenging targets for governor recruitment, but the LEA is making good efforts and progress to meeting these.

86. A major strength of the LEA is the support it provides to governing bodies in schools causing concern. Support is very effectively targeted at these schools. Strategies include the appointment of additional governors and governors with particular expertise. Support from the GSU and the personnel and finance services are provided. Monitoring by HMI confirms that where the LEA has supported governing bodies of schools in difficulties, governor capability in participating in school improvement and monitoring school progress has greatly improved.

Support for early years

87. Support for early years is very good and the early years partnership is strong. The partnership is active and encourages good co-operation with voluntary and maintained groups and the private sector. It also has clear and realistic priorities for development. There are over 1000 providers of early education in Hampshire. Good work is underway to identify and train teachers from all sectors so that they can take up the posts of specialist teachers as required by new legislation.

88. Recommendations

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- ensure that all visits to schools by AIs are followed up promptly by a brief note of visit, showing the list of identified action points and identifying any relevant leadership and management issues at the school;
- review the provision of centrally-funded visits by AIs to the better performing schools in line with the Code of Practice;
- place a greater emphasis on judging AI effectiveness through greater reference to pupil outcomes;
- improve the support for literacy by encouraging schools to set more aspirational targets and further developing links between AIs and the English team; and
- further strengthen the leadership and senior management expertise available to advise and support secondary schools.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

89. Corporate planning is satisfactory, with strengths outweighing weaknesses. Local government reorganisation was managed well with established structures effectively supplemented by new approaches to achieve a good level of continuity. Corporate understanding of the place of the education service is good and the CEO is a key player in the corporate management team. Corporate plans show education and inclusion as key priorities.

90. Education's role in delivering outcomes of corporate strategy is clearly identified both in corporate and LEA material. The education service aims to create the conditions in which self-managing schools can flourish and achieve high standards. Schools are aware and support the LEA's priorities and key features of its approach in supporting governors, working in partnership with local dioceses, linking with other local authorities and liaising with trades unions, are all carried out effectively.

91. Elected members have a clear vision for education. They also have a clear view of their strategic role in the context of autonomous schools, and are seen by schools as supportive. Decisions related to education are well informed and taken in a reasonable and timely way. Procedures for accountability are well established and there is appropriate delegation to officers. There is good cross-party working among members. Where decisions are required, lead members are involved at an early stage and officers provide good support, including clear, succinct and well-informed alternatives.

92. Members have access to a range of performance data and are helped to keep up to date via briefings, seminars and written material. Relations between the spokespersons of the political parties are constructive and minority spokespersons are provided with open briefings as required. Members monitor the work of the education department and schools, focusing in particular, on areas of weakness. The schools monitoring sub-committee monitors the progress of schools causing concern and receives various other progress reports. Inputs by ASIMs are particularly valued. There is, however, scope for the committee to receive a wider range of performance data and to be more proactive, for example in monitoring 'coasting' schools.

93. Consultation with schools is mostly good, with effective use made of headteacher and governor networks. Headteacher conferences are seen as critical to LEA work and standing conferences for primary, secondary and special school headteachers meet several times each term. There are also

primary area headteacher groups and specialist headteacher sub-groups. The size of the county makes communication an ongoing challenge.

94. The re-integration of the former grant-maintained (GM) schools has been difficult. Many of the headteachers of these schools are still sceptical about the value for money that the LEA provides; however, they have been singularly unsuccessful in persuading other headteachers to their view. The evidence from this inspection is that the former GM schools are right to question the extent of routine monitoring visits to successful schools, but are overly critical of the LEA's other services. There have been no barriers to participation in LEA initiatives and ex-GM headteachers are fully represented on LEA advisory and consultative groups.

95. The leadership of the LEA is effective. Schools have a high regard for the CEO who is seen as responsive to their needs. Other recent senior LEA appointments are also seen as reflecting a strong commitment to school improvement. Leadership is consistent, purposeful and challenging, with a high level of commitment to partnership. Members of the EDMT have high expectations of staff and schools and respond well to new initiatives. Despite weaknesses in the EDP, performance management is integral to most services. SLAs are monitored through review groups and various other feedback mechanisms. Progress is reviewed regularly and lessons learnt feed into further planning.

96. Support for crisis and emergency management is good. Shortly before the inspection, a fire and a flood at two schools required the LEA to erect temporary accommodation. The LEA managed this well. Discussions with schools also showed that the LEA's procedures in times of crisis were appropriate and well managed.

Partnerships

97. The LEA has successfully established strong links with its partners, although good planning is not consistently reflected in the level of collaboration on the ground. At a strategic level, good liaison and effective communication with partners have become well established.

98. At directorate level, common issues are discussed intensively by the education and social services departments and there has been very good working between the two departments in establishing suitable protocols. Staffing shortages, however, sometimes lead to the implementation of plans breaking down, in turn leading to considerable frustration among headteachers. There have been several examples of the departments successfully working together, for example in support for early years, in providing training for designated teachers for children in public care and in developing family group conferences. A joint project for children with severe

learning difficulties and associated complex behaviour has also been successful.

99. Partnership with the health authorities and health trusts is complex owing to there being three different authorities and seven primary care trusts, each with different structures and funding arrangements. There are some examples of good service co-operation such as a jointly funded speech and language project. Effective partnerships exist with voluntary agencies, such as the Hampshire Dyslexic Society. The voluntary sector also makes a very significant contribution to the Youth Service.

100. The partnership with the police is greatly valued by schools. Successful initiatives have included raising pupil awareness of the harmful effects of drug abuse and the importance of personal safety. Pilot projects in areas such as combating truancy have also been effective.

101. The Leigh Park EAZ began in September 2000 serving the five most deprived wards in the south east of the county around Havant, where disaffection is high. The LEA has played an important role in developing the proposal. An education officer was seconded to write the original bid and the LEA has committed extra adviser time to schools in the zone to help support school improvement. An LEA officer chairs various partnership groups and the LEA has collaborated well with local business and higher education partners. There are good links with the local borough council and family literacy schemes are in place in several primary schools.

Support for school infrastructure: management services

102. Support for schools in the procurement of services is good. There are comprehensive and effective arrangements for consultation with schools on service planning and evaluation and regular surveys of customer satisfaction are undertaken. This activity is well co-ordinated and responses received from schools inform future planning. Services have a strong customer focus. The information provided to schools on traded services describes fully the range of support available. Reasonable choice is offered, although the literature contains no reference to expected performance standards and does not in every case state which aspects of a service are to be provided from central funds. This inhibits schools in making fully informed purchasing decisions. Many of the LEA's business units provide services to other public agencies and/or commission some services from the private sector. There is hence a sound awareness of market conditions.

103. Support for **information management and ICT** is good and the LEA's strategy for these areas is developing well. Liaison arrangements with school representatives are good and the LEA is currently restructuring services to bring the curricular, administrative, and information management aspects of ICT service planning and delivery much closer together. The documentation

of the strategy does not, however, fully reflect the quality of the work being undertaken. Strategy documents provide a detailed list of most of the activities planned but could be better structured. Timescales, outcome indicators, performance targets and coverage of resourcing implications require some further development. The documents are hence less helpful than they might be as a means of monitoring progress and of informing schools and providing them with guidance on developing their own systems.

104. Existing systems to support school administration and the exchange of information are already comparatively good and are about to be improved. Schools' basic needs in terms of administrative ICT systems are being met and electronic links between schools and the LEA have existed for several years. A major project to improve and integrate existing software support will be implemented this year. This will greatly enhance the capacity for data analysis and the provision of management information for schools and the LEA. Broadband links with the LEA will also be available this year to all schools that want this. A full range of support services is offered to schools and the great majority of schools purchase services from the LEA. Software support via the help-line service is particularly valued.

105. Support for **financial management** is very good. Written guidance is comprehensive and accessible and accounting arrangements meet all schools' basic needs. Schools have had 'on-line' access to the LEA's financial management system for several years and have control over all aspects of charging to their budgets. Few proposed charges require correction. The great majority of schools purchase additional support services from the LEA. Information and support for school budget planning and review is good. Staff are regarded as responsive and helpful. Useful indicative information on school delegated budgets is provided. The payroll service works well. Monitoring of school spending by the LEA is appropriate. In recent years, very few schools have incurred deficits that have given cause for concern. Useful financial benchmarking data is provided.

106. Support provided by the **education personnel** service is excellent. The great majority of schools purchase the services offered. Written guidance is very full and it is difficult to see where significant improvements could be made. Casework support is reliable and robust, whilst maintaining due care for the interests of individuals. Some useful management information is provided for schools and there are plans to enhance this when the new integrated ICT system is operational. Staff recruitment and retention has become a key issue in significant parts of the county, largely because of the high costs of housing. The LEA has taken some steps to address this issue, but the resources for recruitment and retention initiatives have been delegated to schools.

107. Schools are generally well supported by the LEA in fulfilling their **property management** responsibilities. A full range of client support

services is offered and the take-up by schools is very high, particularly for buildings and grounds maintenance support. Any difficulties usually relate to problems with the recruitment and retention of staff. These difficulties affect local private sector providers also. Useful written guidance is provided.

108. The provision of **school meals** has some strong features. The great majority of schools with delegated budgets buy a client support service from the LEA. Contracts let in recent years have brought both financial benefit to schools and a significant increase in the take-up of paid meals. Delivery costs in the service provided by the LEA to schools without delegated budgets are comparatively low. Good steps have been taken to canvass the views of pupils, parents, headteachers, and governors. Staffing difficulties for contractors in some parts of the county have affected service delivery.

109. **Home to school transport** provision is generally sound. Escalating cost has been a key issue for a number of years, with both budget increases and overspends. The LEA has embarked on a good range of pilot projects aimed at improving the cost effectiveness of service delivery and some savings have already accrued. Whilst expenditure has increased significantly again in the current year, it is now being controlled within the budgetary provision. New systems have been introduced which allow the LEA to record the reasons for each change in the level and cost of provision and hence produce analyses to guide future work.

110. **Recommendations**

In order to improve strategic management:

- broaden the role of the schools monitoring sub-committee to include the monitoring of the performance of schools more generally and improve its access to performance data to enable it to be more proactive; and
- produce a single strategic development plan for information management and ICT support covering planned activities, timescales, resource implications, performance indicators, and targets and circulate to all schools.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Strategy

111. The LEA strategy for the management of SEN is sound. The SEN policy and action plan has significant strengths. The three key strands of the plan provide a firm basis for establishing a clear strategic framework for inclusive education. Greater flexibility is being developed in the placement of pupils in mainstream or in/out-county special schools involving individual packages of support to enable young people with exceptional needs to be maintained in their homes and local schools.

112. The first of the strands in the LEA's approach covers the development of inclusive education. This has resulted in more children being provided for in inclusive early years settings and progressing to mainstream placements early in their statutory education. This dovetails well with the LEA's support for early excellence centres and the early years development plan. Pupils with a range of physical, language and sensory difficulties have, over a period of years, been integrated into mainstream schools with specially resourced provision. This has enabled the LEA to create space for pupils with more complex problems in the county's special schools. This in turn has made it possible to hold the number of out-county placements at low levels with improved matching of placements to pupil needs. Numbers in special schools fell from 2,139 in autumn 1998 to 2,074 in autumn 2000. Over the same period, there was a 33.4 per cent increase in resourced places for pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

113. The second strand of the LEA's approach is to further develop and improve provision for pupils with very complex behavioural difficulties. The LEA recognises that more needs to be done to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in managing pupils whose behaviour is challenging. Additional funding has been put into the special schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties to support the management of pupils with very complex behavioural difficulties, but again some schools need to be clearer as to how the LEA intends to tackle this issue in the longer term.

114. The third strand in the LEA approach is to ensure greater equity and consistency in resourcing for SEN across the county. The funding formula ensures that much of the funding for non-statemented SEN pupils in mainstream schools is distributed on the basis of an audit of special needs in each school. There is a recognised need to ensure that the LEA provides sufficient SEN places in a range of different types of school. Two new units for pupils with Asperger's Syndrome are being set up in the north and south of the county. There are two total communication units in primary schools and a new resource in a secondary school. This should result in further considerable savings as pupils with more complex needs can be provided for within, rather than outside, the county.

115. The LEA is clearly committed to raising standards for pupils with SEN. Some recent changes at local level have been successful, but the absence of some schools from discussions on future development countywide has meant some uncertainty about the overall picture. Conferences on inclusion have been provided for schools and parents have been involved in discussing forthcoming changes. Some parents, however, would like more information.

Statutory responsibilities

116. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities for SEN very effectively, with, for example, 94 per cent of statutory assessments completed within the expected 18-week period. Even when exceptions are taken into account, the figure is a high 83 per cent. The LEA is working closely with primary care trusts to speed up the provision of good quality medical advice to further improve the production of statements within the 18-week deadline. Procedures for standardising assessments are in place and all requests for assessment are channelled through the county moderation group.

117. The LEA has successfully reduced the number of statements by focusing on low incidence cases and providing schools with a greater level of funding allowing them greater flexibility in responding to pupils' needs. The SEN audit enables funding to be appropriately targeted. The moderation process is well managed, although it does involve school special needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in heavy paperwork.

118. The quality of statements and individual education plans are good. Annual reviews are conducted appropriately and transition plans are completed satisfactorily. Parents are well informed about their rights. The LEA employs a mediation/conciliation officer and parents/carers interviewed reported that he gave them high quality and neutral support. Tribunal arrangements are also good.

SEN functions to support school improvement

119. The provision and support for SEN are very good. The LEA maintains a wide range of high quality services to support pupils with SEN. Headteachers with designated specialist SEN centres attached to their schools spoke very highly of the support that they received from the LEA. They stated that the support given had led to improved teaching and learning both for pupils with visual or hearing impairment and for those with physical disabilities. The support provided generally for children with sensory impairment and physical disabilities by specialist teacher advisers and SEN inspectors is also effective.

120. The educational psychology service is large and the quality of the work of the service was highly regarded in many of the schools visited (see also under 'Behaviour at school'). The portage service, managed by the principal educational psychologist, is also effective.

121. SENCOs interviewed considered the training courses provided by the LEA for them to be good. Schools visited valued the expertise of the SEN Inspectors and had benefited from the advice given. Schools also value the handbook that gives practical advice on different types of SEN.

Value for money

122. The LEA gives good value for money in all areas of SEN. The SEN budget has been a 'long running issue' but it is not out of control. Funds are well targeted to SEN priorities and the overspending in the current year is not dramatic. The additional funding of £200,000 for EBD schools for the placement of children with more complex/severe behavioural needs has resulted in fewer out of county placements in line with the LEA's strategy. This has also resulted in considerable savings.

123. The overall proportion of spending on SEN is very close to the average for English county councils. Arrangements to monitor the use of SEN funds in schools are sound. These include regular random checks made by SEN inspectors following the allocation of funds via the audit process.

124. Recommendations

In order to improve support for pupils with SEN:

- consider how key points of the SEN policy and action plan can be shared effectively with all stakeholders across the county;
- work with mainstream schools to extend the range of training so that teachers become more confident in managing pupils with challenging behaviour; and
- work with the health authorities and primary health care trusts to improve the speed and quality of medical advice for the statutory assessment of pupils with SEN.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

125. The LEA's planning of school provision is very good. Forecasting of pupil numbers both in total and at local level is very accurate and the LEA has achieved a close match between provision and demand. In primary and secondary schools, the percentage of surplus places and the percentage of pupils in excess of school capacity, are both below English county averages.

126. The LEA's school organisation plan was produced on time after full consultation. The first annual revision was also completed to the required timetable. It provides a clear and concise summary of projected need for both primary and secondary provision in each local area, together with the action required. It also provides useful information about planned developments in SEN provision across the county. The plan is weaker in its coverage of provision for post-16 and for children educated otherwise than at school. However, the LEA is taking appropriate action to meet the requirement for full-time provision for education otherwise from September 2002.

127. Arrangements for consultation with the LEA's partners in the planning of provision are effective and working relationships are good. A significant number of changes to the levels and organisation of provision have been made in recent years and more are planned. A distinctive and strong feature of the LEA's approach is the prominence given to school performance as a key factor in the consideration of development options.

Asset management

128. Asset management planning is good. The DfEE's deadlines for submitting both policy statements and data on the condition and suitability of school buildings have all been met. Arrangements for consultation with schools on all aspects of asset management planning are good. Condition and suitability surveys have been carried out in close collaboration with schools. Schools have confidence in the conduct of the condition surveys, although the follow-up reports fail to specify clearly the individual works required and do not include a division of funding responsibilities between the school and the LEA.

129. The LEA has yet to summarise the condition survey data in a way that clearly indicates the division of funding responsibility between itself and schools. Such information is crucial if officers are to give authoritative advice to members during budget making. The LEA's investment in school buildings in recent years has been significantly above the English counties average. Whilst substantial sums have been spent on new provision and on the removal of surplus places, the major part of the capital budget has been

spent on the improvement, replacement, and repair of existing stock. The management of major building projects is generally good.

Admissions

130. Admissions arrangements for both primary and secondary schools are good. Approval ratings from parents are high. An admissions forum with wide representation of interested groups was established during autumn 1999 and is working well. Although the provision of information and advice to parents works satisfactorily, the admissions brochure has some important omissions and weaknesses.

131. The planned timetables for admission to the main reception years are appropriate. However, the secondary transfer process for this year's intake did not go to plan, as the LEA had difficulties in responding to the number of appeals received. The arrangements for hearing appeals are now being reviewed. It would be appropriate for this review to include the conduct of the appeal hearings, focusing in particular on parental feelings and their need for support. Arrangements for the transfer to mainstream secondary schools of children with SEN statements are satisfactory.

132. The LEA has recently completed a Best Value review of its admissions arrangements and the appropriateness of this review was a particular focus of the inspection. The inspection found the review to have been conducted with rigour and imagination. The membership of the review team was well conceived to ensure robust challenge and considerable attention was given to this issue. The review focused quite understandably on how, rather than why, the service is delivered. A specific study was undertaken of organisations, both public and private, operating in the same or similar fields, with a particular view to outsourcing options. The LEA already makes use of consultants to assist workload peaks associated with appeals.

133. Consultation within the review covered the main stakeholder groups and relied principally on questionnaire surveys. These were well constructed and sample sizes were appropriate. Opportunity was also included for written comments. It might have been useful to consider the use of focus groups, which would have provided the opportunity to explore the views and feelings of stakeholders in greater depth. In comparing its performance over time and with that of other authorities the LEA collected and analysed all relevant data available. It also took worthwhile steps to improve the range and detail of such data.

134. The LEA's action plan to follow up the findings of the review is appropriate. All the key issues are addressed and some challenging targets have been set for the completion of the appeals process. There are clear indications that the review has heightened awareness of the client perspective and this alone should help an already good service to get better.

This, together with improvements in the range and quality of benchmarking data now being considered, suggests that there is good capacity for continued improvement.

The provision for pupils who have no school place

135. The LEA discharges its statutory duty to provide education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) satisfactorily. Provision includes home tuition, provision for sick children, pupil referral units and links with Further Education for Key Stage 4 pupils who are unlikely to be reintegrated into school. All are satisfactory.

136. At the time of the inspection the EOTAS service was being combined with the behaviour improvement service (BIS) to form a new single service built around area support teams. Following the re-organisation, the intention is to re-focus support, with less emphasis on supporting permanently excluded pupils and greater priority on promoting pupil re-integration.

137. The LEA does not provide full-time education for all permanently excluded pupils but is moving towards this goal. Three PRUs offer full-time provision and another four offer approximately 12.5 hours per week on a sessional basis. Some pupils, particularly those permanently excluded in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 receive varying levels of provision for five to 12.5 hours in either support tuition bases or via one-to-one home tuition. This is not sufficient and the legal status of these bases requires attention. In addition, 85 places are set aside in PRUs for phobic pupils.

138. Prompt reintegration of pupils-out-of-school into mainstream is a clear policy aim. However, of the 484 pupils who had a place in a PRU over the last two years, only 23.6 per cent have been successfully reintegrated to their original or to a new school. A significant proportion has remained in a PRU for over 12 months. The re-organisation of the EOTAS service is a key strategy in the LEA's plan to improve on these figures.

139. The EOTAS service has been under the arm of the inclusion branch for 18 months. There have been a number of improvements in this short space of time, for example in keeping within budget. However, two out of the 16 schools visited were unclear whether to make refer cases for support to either EOTAS or BIS. Moves to transform the service from one which concentrates on making statutory provision for excluded and sick pupils to one that is proactively engaged in preventative work should begin to address this.

140. The LEA has a satisfactory procedure for registering and monitoring pupils who are educated at home. The monitoring reports for the last year show that suitable checks were made on pupils. New contract arrangements with home-tutors will allow greater flexibility in their deployment and give

managers the ability to focus more readily on preventative and reintegration work.

Attendance at school

141. Although attendance levels in schools are high, support for attendance has been unsatisfactory and limited progress has been made in meeting targets to reduce truancy levels. Difficulties have arisen in maintaining effective support to schools from the educational welfare service (EWS). Severe recruitment and retention difficulties have impacted upon service delivery. The LEA has recognised the problems and has recently begun restructuring the service to remedy them.

142. The EWS has experienced unusually high staff turnover since 1997. In that time, two-thirds of the education welfare officers (EWOs) have left. The result has been discontinuity and gaps in support for schools and heavy workloads for those remaining. At the time of the inspection, there were seven area EWO vacancies and another for supporting Travellers' children. The service meets minimum statutory requirements but staff shortages have made it difficult to provide a full range of services. The EWOs in post are well qualified and support from individual officers is sound and often good.

143. The initial behaviour support plan (BSP) failed to define strategies for promoting attendance. Documentation to schools does not give sufficient guidance on referral procedures and this has led to variable practice in the schools. There have been some improvements; the revised BSP does refer to attendance and new guidance for schools is being prepared. However, the new service development plan for 2000-3 is weak. It does not incorporate targets set in the EDP; success criteria are too vague; there are no timescales for improvement and actions are confused with outcomes. In particular, support for schools in setting and monitoring appropriate targets for reducing unauthorised absences is currently weak and the plans do not set a clear strategy to tackle this.

144. The LEA is now targeting its resources to areas of greatest need and the formula for allocating time has recently been revised in consultation with representative headteachers. In addition, 10 per cent of the Pupil Retention Grant has been allocated to secondary schools with high levels of unauthorised absence in order to meet targets in the EDP. The service has also started to use a tracking proforma for targeted pupils so that the effectiveness of support can be evaluated.

145. Family group conferences have been introduced as a means of helping to resolve cases of poor school attendance, behaviour and to help prevent exclusion. With the police, the LEA has also piloted truancy schemes in four areas and the outcomes of these are being evaluated.

Behaviour at school

146. Support to improve pupil behaviour is satisfactory but should be improved. The LEA has been successful in sharply reducing permanent exclusions, but support generally is not well co-ordinated. Plans to combine EOTAS and BIS into a unified service should address this. (See under 'The provision for pupils who have no school place'.)

147. Both EOTAS and BIS provide useful support to schools in managing pupils with challenging behaviour. It is likely that the planned changes will result in the support available becoming coherent, although further work is necessary in order for schools to feel confident of its effectiveness.

148. A continuum of support has been developed and a number of multi-agency initiatives including anger management and family support are operating successfully. This is not universally available in all areas and criteria for triggering and accessing support for pupils with emotional difficulties are not applied consistently, leading to confusion. In a minority of schools visited the response to referrals had not been rapid enough.

149. Once intervention is activated, the quality of support is good and clear procedures are in place to ensure that prior to any referral a school is able to take action to begin addressing the problem.

150. PRUs provide outreach support for schools, and in parts of the county the expertise in special schools is used effectively to support mainstream schools. However, these arrangements do not yet work consistently. In some areas, distance from support limits its effectiveness.

151. In addition to consultation delivered through a pattern of regular visits, the educational psychology service assists schools by providing training and support for behaviour co-ordinators. The service provides advice on anger management and drop-in surgeries to offer advice to teachers on managing challenging behaviour. Schools are also well supported in producing their own behaviour policies.

152. The number of exclusions is monitored carefully and good progress has been made towards reaching exclusion targets. Schools also have access to expert advice and support on legal procedures governing exclusion.

Health and safety, welfare and child protection

153. Support for health and safety, welfare and child protection is good and the LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations.

154. The principal EWO is a member of the area child protection committee and chairs one of its sub-committees. This committee co-ordinates inter-

agency management of child protection cases and there is good liaison with social services. Designated teachers are in place in schools and the training provided for these and other staff is good.

155. The LEA also takes appropriate steps to meet its statutory obligations for health and safety and has clearly defined policies. It has produced good quality guidance for schools and updates this on a frequent and regular basis.

Support for children in public care

156. Support for children in public care is satisfactory. A significant proportion of the children in Year 11 attained GCSEs last year and an impressive 62 per cent went on to further education. The quality of pastoral care for children in public care is good, with the group being the highest category for referrals for support from the various children's services. There is good liaison with social services to help raise educational attainment.

157. The BSP identifies an appropriate strategy for providing support, but the lack of a clear action plan is not helpful. In some parts of the county, educational social workers are provided to support the most vulnerable pupils. Difficulties in recruitment and retention, however, have hampered their impact. Designated teachers have been appointed and the jointly delivered training of these teachers (by the education and social services departments) has led to significant improvements in the way schools support the children.

158. The monitoring of attendance and exclusion data by the EWS assists the LEA in planning early intervention. There is, however, no system for monitoring pupils' progress over time against their prior attainment. With the appointment of designated teachers, information exchange between headteachers and social workers about pupil movement has become more effective. Last year, social services successfully exceeded its own target to reduce the number of place movements for children in public care and helped to achieve much greater continuity in their schooling. The drawing up of personal education plans is helping to generate more coherent and consistent support for individual pupils.

Support for ethnic minority children including Travellers

159. Support for the small numbers of ethnic minority pupils is good.

160. Although the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is low (at less than 1 per cent), the challenge for the LEA is a considerable one. The pupils are distributed across 40 per cent of the schools and they speak a total of 51 different languages. The number of refugee children has also recently increased significantly, with 242 new arrivals in the six months prior to the inspection.

161. The needs of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) receive good support from the language service. The service is well led and is appropriately focused on helping schools to support their own pupils. LEA literacy consultants have also been trained to provide EAL support and there are strong links with SEN support staff. The LEA collects data on all pupils with EAL but not on all pupils of minority ethnic heritage. This is now being addressed.

162. There is satisfactory support for Travellers' children, although staff sickness and vacancies have stretched the resources of this small service.

Support for gifted and talented children

163. Support for gifted pupils is good. The LEA has been able to build on initiatives started in 1994, resulting in more advanced procedures and systems than in most other LEAs. Guidance and resources for both primary and secondary schools are good. Seven summer schools for gifted children were arranged in 1999, followed by a further eight in 2000. Training was provided before the events and their impact was evaluated by a group of primary and secondary headteachers.

164. Appropriately, the main thrust of support is to meet pupils' needs through the main curriculum rather than through one-off activities. There is evidence that the initiatives are being effective. Over the last five years, there has been notable improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving higher levels at the end of each key stage in primary schools. The proportion of pupils obtaining higher GCSE grades has also increased at greater than the national rate.

165. Support for schools bidding for specialist status has been successful, developing rapidly following the setting of a clear policy in March 1999. So far, seven schools have made successful bids.

Combating social exclusion, including racism

166. The LEA has responded appropriately to the Macpherson Report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It has produced good quality guidance on handling and recording racial incidents in schools and collects appropriate data that is reported to members. The LEA is using the Committee for Racial Equality standards to evaluate its own performance and also encouraging schools to adopt these standards. Training on combating racism has been offered to schools through an annual course for the last eight years.

167. The LEA has piloted a number of work-related learning projects at Key Stage 4 in various secondary schools. These are well planned, offer a choice

of vocational areas and are appropriately targeted. Schemes are also in place to smooth the 14-19 transition for vulnerable pupils based on the increasing use of extended work-related learning.

168. **Recommendations**

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- improve asset management by more accurately assessing the requirements for repair, replacement and improvement expenditure against budgetary provision;
- improve support for attendance by:
 - further developing schemes to recruit and retain high quality educational welfare workers;
 - ensuring the updating of guidance to schools so that there are consistently effective procedures for early identification, referral and follow-up of absence;
 - improve planning to detail how schools with the greatest need are identified, supported, monitored, challenged and provided with feedback on the effectiveness of their procedures;
- improve support for pupil behaviour by:
 - ensuring that the revised BSP has a detailed action plan for each activity;
 - more consistently applying the criteria for triggering and accessing support for pupils with complex behavioural difficulties;
 - ensuring a better co-ordinated approach to supporting schools in the management of challenging behaviour; and
- improve the support for minority ethnic pupils, by collecting appropriate data on the achievement of these pupils to ensure that support can be more accurately targeted.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- in the planned revision of the EDP, relate priorities and activities more precisely to the audit of needs; and
- further raise members' capacity to identify the extent to which the EDP is providing value for money, by sharpening the performance indicators used to evaluate the effectiveness of EDP activities.

In order to improve support for school improvement:

- ensure that all visits to schools by AIs are followed up promptly by a brief note of visit, showing the list of identified action points and identifying any relevant leadership and management issues at the school;
- review the provision of centrally-funded visits by AIs to the better performing schools in line with the Code of Practice;
- place a greater emphasis on judging AI effectiveness through greater reference to pupil outcomes;
- improve the support for literacy by encouraging schools to set more aspirational targets and further developing links between AIs and the English team; and
- further strengthen the leadership and senior management expertise available to advise and support secondary schools.

In order to improve strategic management:

- broaden the role of the schools monitoring sub-committee to include the monitoring of the performance of schools more generally and improve its access to performance data to enable it to be more proactive; and
- produce a single strategic development plan for information management and ICT support covering planned activities, timescales, resource implications, performance indicators, and targets and circulate to all schools.

In order to improve support for pupils with SEN:

- consider how key points of the SEN policy and action plan can be shared effectively with all stakeholders across the county;

- work with mainstream schools to extend the range of training so that teachers become more confident in managing pupils with challenging behaviour; and
- work with the health authorities and primary health care trusts to improve the speed and quality of medical advice for the statutory assessment of pupils with SEN.

In order to improve pupils' access to education:

- improve asset management by more accurately assessing the requirements for repair, replacement and improvement expenditure against budgetary provision;
- improve support for attendance by:
 - further developing schemes to recruit and retain high quality educational welfare workers;
 - ensuring the updating of guidance to schools so that there are consistently effective procedures for early identification, referral and follow-up of absence;
 - improve planning to detail how schools with the greatest need are identified, supported, monitored, challenged and provided with feedback on the effectiveness of their procedures;
- improve support for pupil behaviour by:
 - ensuring that the revised BSP has a detailed action plan for each activity;
 - more consistently applying the criteria for triggering and accessing support for pupils with complex behavioural difficulties;
 - ensuring a better co-ordinated approach to supporting schools in the management of challenging behaviour; and
- improve the support for minority ethnic pupils, by collecting appropriate data on the achievement of these pupils to ensure that support can be more accurately targeted.

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