

Essex

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: October 2004

Reporting Inspector: Christine Brown HMI

© Crown copyright 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

A report from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Audit Commission (AC) under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the respective local education authority.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Contents

| | Page |
|--|-----------|
| Basic information | v |
| Summary | 7 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Main findings | 8 |
| Recommendations | 9 |
| Section 1: Corporate leadership of education | 10 |
| Summary table of judgements | 10 |
| Corporate planning for education and its implementation | 10 |
| Decision-making | 12 |
| Targeting of resources | 12 |
| Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | 13 |
| Leadership by elected members and advice given to them | 13 |
| Leadership by senior officers | 14 |
| Strategic partnerships | 14 |
| Support for 14-19 education | 15 |
| Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation | 16 |
| Summary table of judgements | 16 |
| The strategy for school improvement and its implementation | 16 |
| The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support | 17 |
| Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools | 18 |
| Asset management planning | 18 |
| Providing school places | 19 |
| Admissions to schools | 19 |
| Section 3: Support to improve education in schools | 21 |
| Summary table of judgements | 21 |
| Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement | 21 |
| Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2 | 22 |
| Support for information and communication technology (ICT) | 23 |
| Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3 | 23 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children | 24 |
| Support for gifted and talented pupils | 24 |
| The supply and quality of teachers | 25 |
| Effectiveness and value for money of services to support information management | 25 |
| Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement | 26 |
| Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN) | 27 |
| Summary table of judgements | 27 |
| The strategy for SEN | 27 |
| Statutory obligations | 28 |
| SEN functions to support school improvement | 28 |
| Value for money | 29 |
| Section 5: Support for social inclusion | 30 |
| Summary table of judgements | 30 |
| The strategy for social inclusion | 30 |
| Provision for pupils educated other than at school | 31 |
| Support for attendance | 32 |
| Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | 32 |
| Provision for looked after children | 33 |
| Promoting racial equality | 33 |
| Appendix A | 35 |
| Record of Judgement Recording Statements | 35 |
| Appendix B | 39 |
| Context of the inspection | 39 |
| Context of the LEA | 40 |
| The performance of schools | 41 |
| Funding data for the LEA | 42 |

Basic information

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Name of LEA: | Essex Local Education Authority |
| LEA number: | 881 |
| Address of LEA: | PO Box 11 County Hall Chelmsford Essex CM1 1 LX |
| Reporting Inspector: | Christine Brown HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | October 2004 |

Summary

Introduction

Essex is a large authority, covering urban and rural areas with very different needs. Despite considerable social diversity, including areas of severe disadvantage as well as affluence, the overall level of prosperity in the county is above average. The council has recognised five diverse areas of need and is developing a strong approach to educational and social improvement within local areas, predicated on building effective partnership working with schools and other stakeholders.

Since the previous inspection in 2001, standards of attainment in schools have risen at a rate in line with national improvements. Generally, they are at least in line with the national averages and the averages in similar local education authorities¹ (LEAs). The council has met many of its challenging performance targets, including those for attendance and for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Despite improvements, targets at Key Stage 2 have not been met, there are wide variations in the performance of individual schools, and some groups of pupils are underachieving.

There have been major changes within the council and the education services since the previous inspection. During 2001-02, the council explored the potential delivery of its education services through an external partner, but in December 2002 decided not to adopt this approach. Instead, in anticipation of *Every Child Matters*, it restructured its services into a 'schools service' and a 'children and young people's service'. These two services sit with the learning and social care strategic core, charged with joining-up approaches to planning and delivery and with shaping and co-ordinating a strategy across children's services. Some new senior officers have been appointed and, at the time of this inspection, the new leadership team had only just become fully operational.

The last election in June 2001 resulted in the Conservatives forming a further administration. The leader and cabinet arrangement was formally introduced in the autumn of 2001. Strategic leadership on all matters concerning children is the responsibility of the leader of the council. The leader is supported by the cabinet and, more particularly, by two portfolio holders for education and for children and families.

¹ The LEAs statistical neighbours are: Cheshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Sussex, Worcestershire

Main findings

Summary: Essex is highly satisfactory in providing for its education functions. It has made highly satisfactory progress since its previous inspection and its capacity for further improvement is also highly satisfactory. The authority knows its main strengths and weaknesses, but there is too much variability in the extent to which individual services make strategic use of data and information. The restructuring of services for children and young people, the visionary leadership of senior officers and the strengthened cross-service and multi-agency working have positioned the authority well for further improvement. There is cautious optimism from schools about future development. However, there is scope for much more involvement of headteachers, governors and other partners in influencing policy, shaping practice and informing political decision-making.

| Areas of strength | | Areas of weakness/for development | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Corporate leadership of education | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Shared vision through the <i>Essex Approach</i>Determined approach of senior officersA range of well-conceived partnership initiatives that demonstrate measurable improvements in standards and attendance, and reduced levels of permanent exclusionsGood quality support and provision for early years education | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Lack of coherence in line management responsibilities and key accountabilitiesInsufficient use of consultative groups to inform key political decisionsScrutiny function that is not adding sufficient valueInsufficient monitoring and evaluation of progress against delivery and service plans | |
| Strategy for education and its implementation | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong advocacy for self-managing schoolsClearly articulated priorities for school improvement and sharply focused actions and activitiesMonitoring and challenge in schools, including the quality and use of data | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Underdeveloped triggers for the identification of weak leadership and management in schools | |
| Support to improve education in schools | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong and effective support for school self-evaluationThe planning and provision of support to schools including for the primary strategy, governors, information and communication technology in the curriculum, recruitment and retention of teachers and services for human resources | | | |
| Support for special educational needs | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong, innovative and forward-thinking strategic leadership and the commitment of schools to inclusionStatutory obligations met through good partnerships with schools and othersClear and strengthening role for special schools in supporting inclusion in mainstream schoolsInvestment in the provision of good management information enabling an increasingly rigorous analysis of value for money | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Some schools not yet entirely confident to implement the Essex approach to inclusion | |
| Support for social inclusion | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Realignment of services to support social inclusion and the strengthened multi-agency workingThe targeting of funding, resources and staffing for pupils educated other than at school | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Management information not used sufficiently to underpin strategic decisionsTimeliness of support for children and young people in need of protectionSupport to ensure schools respond promptly and confidently to racist incidents | |

Recommendations

Key recommendations

Corporate planning: Clarify line management responsibilities and formalise lines of communication; ensure that delivery and service plans are comprehensively monitored and that incisive evaluation and regular reports to elected members inform strategies and targets; ensure a sufficiently strategic overview underpins all decision-making; ensure consultation with stakeholders and partners informs all important decisions, and that full strategic use is made of consultative groups; keep the work programmes of the various development and scrutiny groups under careful review to ensure that they provide comprehensive challenge and effective scrutiny.

Support for school improvement: Clarify the triggers for intervention and challenge for schools with weak leadership and management.

Strategy for social inclusion: Define more clearly the strategy for social inclusion and communicate this to schools; improve data systems to ensure better access to, and analysis of, information so that this can be used more effectively to monitor the progress of vulnerable groups, to evaluate the impact of the strategy and to inform strategic decision-making.

Child protection: Improve further the arrangements for the monitoring of the child protection function in schools; ensure that there are well-established and clearly understood procedures by which schools can report concerns and that there is a system that responds promptly and sensitively to concerns about the welfare and safety of children and young people in need of protection.

Promoting race equality: Work with schools, officers, and relevant partners and agencies to identify actions necessary to address patterns in the reporting of racist incidents, and to enable schools to respond confidently and constructively to incidents.

Other recommendations

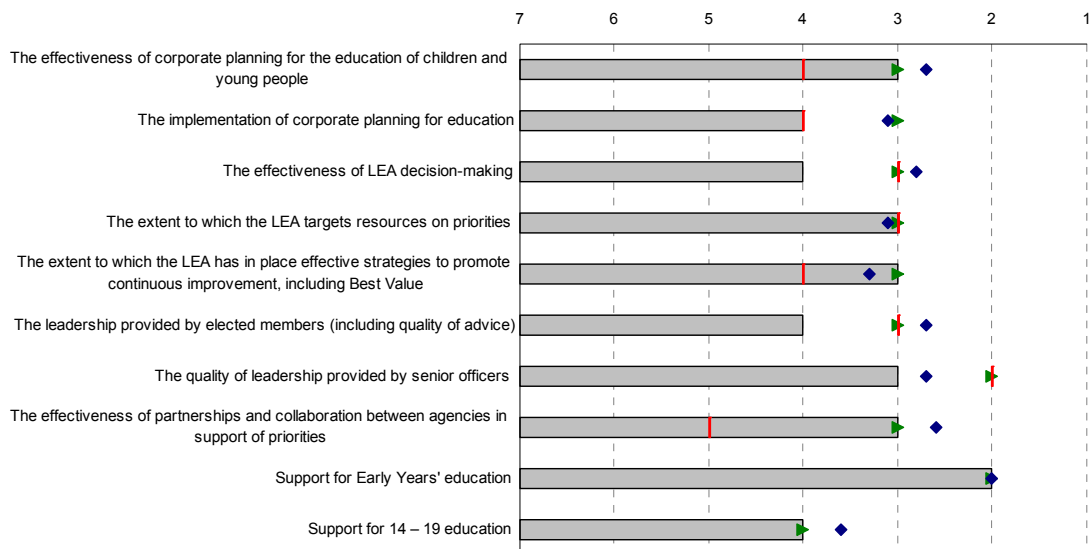
Allocation of resources to priorities: Put in place clear policies and mechanisms to enable the authority to exercise assertively its statutory powers to seek to ensure that schools make effective use of their allocated budgets.

Information management support services: Closely monitor the plan to install broadband and take remedial action if there is any slippage to the proposed timescales.

Looked after children: Ensure that all looked after children have personal education plans; establish manageable procedures for consistently and systematically monitoring the quality of personal education plans.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Corporate planning for the learning and social care strategic core is highly satisfactory. The council's strategic plan, *The Essex Approach*, provides a secure overarching vision for the development of learning and social care services by pledging to 'make it easier for teachers to teach', 'raise attainment for all' and 'improve personal and social development for teenagers'. The top level priorities, values and objectives are derived from, and informed by, public consultation and take careful account of the draft community strategy. Medium-term financial processes have been established to ensure that, at council level, priorities are reflected in budget decisions. Key actions and activities can be traced through the full range of statutory and delivery plans, although in a number of plans there is an absence of clear timescales and milestones upon which to build robust monitoring and evaluation procedures. Good quality planning at the level of individual services has helped to sustain continuous improvement during the recent radical reconfiguration of the services within education.

2. The establishment of the learning and social care strategic core not only anticipated national policy well, but also affirmed a clear commitment to meeting the needs of vulnerable children and to increasing social inclusion. However, the new line management responsibilities and key accountabilities, inherent in the new structure, are not yet coherent. Some important lines of communication are too informal.

3. A new planning framework is now being developed to ensure that systems for realigning policy and developing services are secure and focused effectively on improving outcomes for children and young people. The *Essex Approach* flows positively into the new strategic plan for learning and social care, and highly capable officers from the strategic core help to shape and co-ordinate cross-service planning and delivery. Currently, integrated approaches are applied more effectively for school improvement and special educational needs (SEN) than for social inclusion. Energy is well directed on building county and local Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships (CYPSP) to provide a mechanism for integrating planning. Within the new planning framework, strategic objectives have yet to be translated into robust implementation plans with coherent links to financial planning.

4. Schools and other partners are cautiously optimistic about future developments. Schools still perceive a loss of a strategic direction for education and are not yet totally in tune with integrated learning and social care services, although they are in agreement with the broad principles. Senior officers have made satisfactory progress in building procedures that enable schools and other partners to influence policy and to shape practice. As yet, however, there is no clear map to show the connection between the different consultative groups and how they relate to political decision-making processes. The spirit of involvement and engagement is reported by schools as not yet permeating down to some staff providing key services. Schools also remain unconvinced by the effectiveness of the leadership of elected members. Much of this can be directly attributable to the lack of transparency and insufficient involvement of schools in some of the decisions made.

5. The implementation of corporate planning is satisfactory. Despite not always meeting challenging performance targets, standards of attainment are rising, attendance is improving and permanent exclusions are reducing. Provision and support for the early years are good. There are regular reports to elected members on progress against key performance indicators, especially those in the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) and the Local Public Service Agreement. The monitoring and evaluation of progress against delivery and service plans are less secure. This reduces the effectiveness of the council to hold learning and social care to account, to judge progress and success or to ensure that outcomes and targets are defined precisely.

Recommendations

- Clarify line management responsibilities and formalise lines of communication.
- Ensure that delivery and service plans are comprehensively monitored and that incisive evaluation and regular reports to elected members inform strategies and targets.

Decision-making

6. Decision-making is satisfactory. The council is prepared to make difficult decisions and to take determined action. Budget proposals are subject to vigorous debate before decisions are made and this is leading to financial decisions that carry strong political support. Well-informed decisions are also taken on school closures and investment programmes such as the proposals for new model special schools and the Children's Trust in Braintree.

7. Nevertheless, not all decisions are sufficiently transparent or inclusive. Moreover, decisions are not always informed by suitable consultation with schools and other stakeholders. Some decisions have led to a lack of faith and trust in the perceived worth of partnerships in helping to develop policy and to shape practices. This has the potential to undermine the strategic value of the various consultative groups.

Recommendation

- Ensure consultation with stakeholders and partners informs all important decisions, and that full strategic use is made of the established consultative groups.

Targeting of resources

8. This function remains highly satisfactory. The council has met government targets to pass on increases in spending allocations to schools. A high proportion of available money is delegated to schools; the council retains a frugal amount for strategic management. Money retained for other functions is broadly in line with comparable councils.

9. The Schools Forum has made positive contributions to discussions leading up to the setting of the council's budget. The schools funding formula is regularly and thoroughly reviewed and consultation with schools is extensive. In recent years, the council has reduced successfully, to very close to the local target, the differential between funding for secondary and primary schools.

10. Budget planning and monitoring for the council's education service are effective, although there have been budgetary problems in children's social services. Early budget information and helpful financial modelling are readily available for schools. The council has a good understanding of school budget balances and provides successful support for schools with deficit budgets. There are also effective systems to monitor budget surpluses. However, challenge from officers has not been sufficiently assertive for a small, but significant, proportion of schools with large and continuing surpluses.

Recommendation

- Put in place clear policies and mechanisms to enable the authority to exercise assertively its statutory powers to seek to ensure that schools make effective use of their allocated budgets.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

11. Strategies to promote continuous improvement are highly satisfactory. The BVPP is clear and links well to council strategies and service plans. The council is adopting a more differentiated programme of Best Value reviews, as evidenced by the recent wide-ranging review of transport and the current review of children's services.

12. There are clear linkages between corporate and service plans. A comprehensive system of staff appraisal is in place, with individual performance targets linked to these plans. The management of performance at service level is sound but at the corporate level progress towards strategic outcomes is not sufficiently well monitored by elected members.

13. Senior officers have a secure knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in provision, as evidenced by the accurate self-evaluation produced for this inspection. Recommendations in the previous inspection report were well responded to.

14. When, at the end of a careful procurement process, the council finally decided not to proceed with the outsourcing of education functions, the related review offered little that was useful in the way of an alternative strategy because it had not examined in detail other options for service delivery. Nevertheless, the data gathered, and the understanding about the costs and effectiveness of the education service, have provided valuable information for the planning of future improvements. These include: plans to improve the co-ordination and marketing of traded services to schools; the introduction of a brokerage services to widen the choice of service providers available to schools; and improvements to multi-disciplinary work. The development of a learning and social care strategic core has provided impetus and momentum towards integrated children's services.

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

15. The quality of leadership by elected members is satisfactory. The different political parties demonstrate willingness to work together for the benefit of children and young people within the county. The importance accorded to education is reflected in financial investment and commitment and in ensuring the safeguarding of funding for schools. Elected members have invested in a team of highly competent senior officers who provide them with appropriate advice. When operating collectively, the cabinet makes some very well informed and strategic decisions. Some operational decisions taken by individual cabinet members are not always underpinned by a sufficiently strategic overview.

16. Despite defined and agreed procedures for the development of policy and scrutiny, internal monitoring and challenge by elected members are underdeveloped and the scrutiny function is not adding sufficient value to the work across learning and social care. Improvements are already being secured and clearer remits have been agreed for the different committees and policy development groups. It is too early to determine if the new work programmes for the various groups are manageable or if they will provide sufficiently robust challenge to policy and decisions.

Recommendations

- Ensure that a sufficiently strategic overview always underpins decision-making.
- Keep the work programmes of the various groups under careful review to ensure that they provide comprehensive challenge and effective scrutiny.

Leadership by senior officers

17. The leadership provided by senior officers is already highly satisfactory, despite the newness of the team. The collective breadth of understanding and depth of knowledge of the senior team are being used effectively to formulate a clear vision and direction for the integration of services for children. It is too soon for senior officers to have demonstrated a sustained effect, but it is already clear that they have the necessary determination and persistence, and the strategic capability and management competencies required to succeed.

Strategic partnerships

18. Strategic partnerships are highly satisfactory. In response to a recommendation from the previous inspection, collaboration is now fundamental to the work of learning and social care. This is increasingly so as the authority moves towards realising corporate and educational priorities through an ambitious and well-placed agenda for the local delivery of integrated, multi-agency services.

19. The draft community strategy provides a clear vision for partnership work. A county CYPSP, established to secure improved working across services and agencies, functions as the key co-ordinating body. Its work is firmly focused on translating vision into practice, in line with shared goals. The council is addressing the complex task of aligning a multiplicity of varied, innovative and active partnerships with determination. However, the scale of the task is formidable and, while steady progress is being made, coherence is not yet realised. The authority is a strong contributor to the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP), and effective work with two neighbouring authorities assists with the co-ordination of admissions to schools and with the provision of education post-16.

20. The analysis of the data from different localities is used increasingly to allocate resources to priorities and some pooling of budgets is demonstrating efficient use of resources. Valuable lessons about integrating children's services are being learnt from successful work between educational settings and from the Pathfinder Children's Trust. A range of initiatives within communities and in disadvantaged localities are leading to measurable improvements in standards and attendance, as well as reduced exclusion from schools. Formal mechanisms to consult with young people are functioning well, but their views are not taken sufficiently seriously by all.

Support for 14-19 education

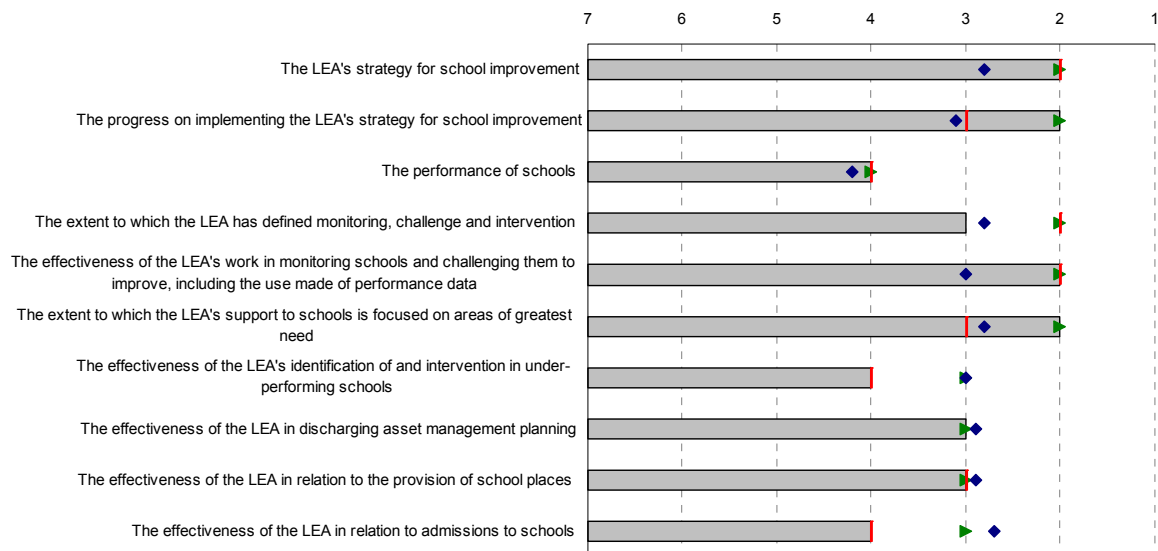
21. The authority's leadership of 14-19 education is satisfactory. All stakeholders, including two adjoining authorities, have recently endorsed a strategy, which acknowledges differences in structures and types of provision. This reflects evolving strategic coherence and the development of an overall vision for 14-19 education and training. Management arrangements, although not yet fully in place, reflect a determination to establish strong and consultative partnerships to guide the implementation and evaluation of strategy.

22. Satisfactory quality assurance procedures and good quality data enable a secure grasp of pre- and post-16 provision and performance. The Education Development Plan (EDP), carefully cross-referenced to the priorities of the Connexions service and to the work of personal advisers, contains relevant activities to support 14-19 developments. The strategic plan to increase progression to higher education using the 'Aimhigher' initiative rightly identifies targeting support to schools for under-represented groups.

23. The authority's plans are starting to contribute to improvements in opportunities and attainment. This year, there has been a marked increase in the number of pupils entering colleges of further education, attributable in part to increased flexibility of curriculum provision at Key Stage 4. However, in some schools, choices are limited and participation rates in education post-16 are low in deprived areas of the county. In some areas there are successful examples of highly innovative work-related partnerships and of strong collaboration between schools and with local colleges. These clearly make a positive difference to attendance and attainment. However, this varies across the authority, as does the extent to which young people have access to impartial information, advice and guidance.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

24. The strategy and provision for school improvement and its implementation are good. They are strengthened by an overarching commitment to school self-management and the promotion of school autonomy. Confident use of a comprehensive range of performance data and other information ensures that priorities for improvement within the EDP for 2004-06 are aligned firmly with the national agenda and local needs. Future changes are anticipated well and integrated planning for children's services is being introduced through a new local priority focused on the implementation of *'Every Child Matters'*.

25. Key dimensions, such as driving up standards, leadership, curriculum provision, workforce remodelling and collaboration, underpin the EDP. These help to bring relevance and coherence across the priority areas. A strong research base reinforces the sharply focused actions and activities and there are clear links across the strategies for school improvement, social inclusion and SEN. The work of partners in developing excellence clusters and 14-19 initiatives is well integrated into planning. The plan is feasible, but timescales and success criteria are not always defined clearly.

26. Monitoring and evaluation by officers of the effectiveness of the plan are good with detailed progress reports for each priority area and, where necessary, mid year revisions to activities to ensure maximum impact. Despite regular reporting to

elected members, there is insufficient challenge to, and scrutiny of, the effectiveness of initiatives.

27. Challenging but realistic targets are set for improvement; those for raising standards in tests and examinations are based on thorough and effective use of a wide range of information about pupils' performance. The council has met its targets for attendance and GCSE. Despite improvements, targets at Key Stage 2 have not been met and some looked after children are underachieving.

The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support

28. Monitoring, challenge and intervention continue to be good. Schools are placed on one of four well differentiated levels of support, and resources are directed at those schools and areas in most need. This is leading firmly to a reduction in the number of schools needing high levels of support and an improvement in standards of attainment in defined localities across the county. Triggers for intervention are pertinent. They are derived from the interrogation of detailed and extensive data, but the categories are not defined precisely enough for schools to be fully conversant with them.

29. School development advisers (SDAs) are well informed and are generally highly regarded. Productive use of the comprehensive range of data and regular cross-service meetings support effective monitoring of schools' performance. For schools needing intensive provision, school-based meetings help determine the appropriate level and mode of support. Notes of visits, provided for headteachers and chairs of governors, are increasingly informative and constructive. However, they are not always sufficiently challenging because concerns are not always made explicit, especially about the quality of leadership and management. There is effective monitoring of the progress made by pupils with SEN and for underachieving groups. School improvement services are not yet engaged sufficiently in monitoring the quality of schools' provision for race equality and child protection.

30. SDAs provide robust challenge, not only during the target setting process, but also when the school is completing a summary profile of all its data. The Essex Quality Framework continues to complement the effective use of performance data. It remains integral to the authority's support and has increased schools' ability to self-evaluate. In addition, the nationally recognised framework for performance data includes sophisticated tools to help schools track pupils' progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, plan teaching and set individual targets for pupils.

31. As a result of the effective support and challenge, most schools have set appropriately ambitious targets. Those schools not meeting their targets are challenged assiduously to diagnose the reasons and, where necessary, support is redirected accordingly. In areas, where officers have targeted intensive support, schools are making relatively more improvement than over Essex as a whole.

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools

32. This function is satisfactory. Since 2001, officers have reduced gradually the overall proportion of schools identified as underachieving, having serious weaknesses or needing special measures, to below the current national averages. Schools causing concern receive effective support which has mostly resulted in recovery within expected timescales. Exit strategies have been improved, in line with the recommendations in the previous report. There is now a carefully staged approach to reducing support so that schools can maintain and sustain improvements.

33. However, within this mostly positive picture, there are some weaknesses. Occasionally the recovery time has been too slow and too many schools have been in one or more of the categories of concern on more than one occasion. This is sometimes because of difficulties recruiting and retaining good quality teaching staff. However, it is also because triggers for intervention are not defined in sufficient detail to support timely and incisive challenge to weak school leadership. The steering group for schools causing concern monitors action, but sharply focused evaluative reporting to elected members is underdeveloped.

34. Over the last year, the management of underperforming schools has become tighter and increasingly robust. Linked with improving measures for identifying weaknesses and causes for concern, early intervention is increasingly successful. However, officers did not anticipate one primary and one special school recently identified for special measures. In the case of special schools, officers recognise that they need to do more to increase improve their intelligence gathering to identify emerging weaknesses more promptly.

Recommendation

- Clarify the triggers for intervention and challenge for schools with weak leadership and management.

Asset management planning

35. Asset management planning is highly satisfactory. Following a new condition and suitability survey of all schools, officers have full, up-to-date and consistent data. The data have been posted on the intranet so that all schools are able to access information about other schools in the county and thereby improve understanding about the allocation of resources. The priorities for asset management planning are clear and agreed in principle with schools. The authority is managing successfully a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) programme to build new primary schools in Tendring, a new secondary school and the remodelling of two existing schools in Clacton, and a secondary school at Debden Park. A strategy has

also been prepared in partnership with secondary schools under the Building Schools for the Future programme.

36. There is a fair and effective strategy to secure and allocate resources for the improvement of school buildings, although not all schools are clear about how this process works. Officers have established an AMP consultative group in order to consult with schools and other stakeholders about priorities. This is increasing transparency and accountability.

37. Effective processes are in place to monitor how schools make use of devolved capital and other funding. The council has a good record of ensuring that building work is completed within time and budget allocations.

Providing school places

38. The provision of school places remains highly satisfactory. Necessary action has been taken to remove surplus places. The proportion of surplus places across the county is not excessive and is in line with other councils and with Essex's own targets. Forecasts of pupil numbers are accurate at county and district level. However, because of the uncertainty of the impact of parental preferences, forecasting at school level is less accurate.

39. The School Organisation Committee is constituted appropriately and operates independently of the council. The school organisation plan (SOP) includes an analysis of how school capacity matches the forecast school population and identifies clearly where action should be taken to reduce surpluses and to provide additional places. Schools and other stakeholders are consulted well about the overall plan and extensive local consultations are held whenever significant changes are proposed to any school or group of schools. The SOP is backed by a useful surplus places management plan which provides the basis for continuing work on reducing surplus places.

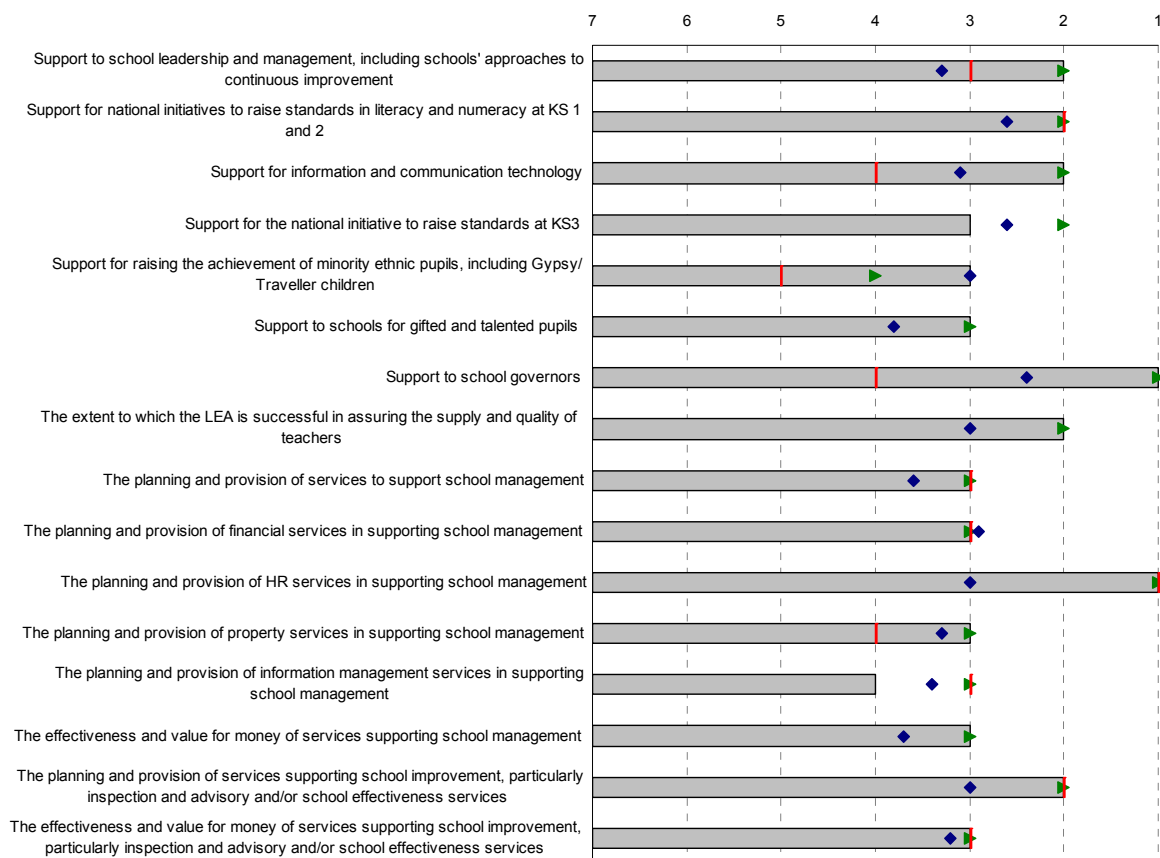
Admissions to schools

40. Arrangements for admissions of pupils to schools in Essex remain satisfactory. Officers work within a diverse and challenging context; there are 192 admission authorities, accounted for by the large number of voluntary aided and Foundation schools plus the council. The council has shown effective leadership in preparing and securing agreement for co-ordinated admissions for secondary schools for September 2005. Most aspects of the system have been agreed through negotiation. Some issues have been referred by the council to the schools' adjudicator; in almost all cases the adjudicator has supported the council's proposals. Admissions applications under the new processes are underway, but it is too early to judge whether they have operated successfully. As with many other authorities nationally, the introduction of co-ordinated admissions to primary schools has been delayed, with the consent of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), until 2006.

41. The admissions forum is operating satisfactorily. The admissions criteria for LEA schools are fair and objective, but there are some inconsistencies between the criteria of different admissions authorities. Children with SEN or those looked after by the council are given appropriate priority in the admissions criteria of all schools in the county. Most of the admissions authorities in the county, including the LEA, deal with appeals in a timely way to ensure that decisions enable pupils to take part in induction activities at their new schools. Information for parents is generally helpful, although there are weaknesses in the clarity of information about the extent to which schools are over-subscribed.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

42. Support for school leadership and management is good. Recent restructuring of the support services has led to better collaboration across services and increasingly well-targeted support. This is underpinned by a well organised system for sharing information across services. There is a clear drive to cultivate strong partnerships, do all possible to help teachers to teach and to develop school self-management, evidenced by such initiatives as the devolution of the management of education welfare officers to local cluster groups of schools.

43. Effective support for the national strategies, for ICT in the curriculum and a strong emphasis on school self-evaluation are having a significant and positive effect on school improvement. Consequently, the number of schools in special measures and having serious weaknesses is diminishing, as is the council's own list of schools causing concern. Evidence from Ofsted inspections of schools over the past three years indicates that leadership and management are improving, even though there is

more to do to improve levels of very good leadership and management in primary schools and to reduce that which is unsatisfactory. Good training for headteachers, governors and middle managers, in close collaboration with headteacher associations, makes effective use of cluster work and national training programmes.

44. The authority has developed a wide range of effective ways of sharing interesting, good and best practice. In particular, it uses its advanced skills teachers and its beacon and leading edge schools well, and is developing high quality materials and websites. It has also cultivated a strong research ethos and deploys teams of its best consultants and teachers to good effect.

45. The planning and provision of services to support school management are, in the main, highly satisfactory or better. Impartial advice is increasingly available to widen the choice of service providers. The governors' support service is very good. Services for human resources provide very good model policies, well-supported case work and high quality training. However, the support for information management, although satisfactory, still has some way to go before performance data are co-ordinated effectively across services. A recent decision not to renew an 'in-house' contract for school meals left schools limited time to sort out their own arrangements and led to a heavy workload for school staff at an already pressurised time.

Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2

46. Support for the primary national initiatives is good with some features that are very good. The primary strategy is well managed by a principal adviser who provides very effective leadership. Her knowledge and determination have done much to drive improvement. Literacy and numeracy strand managers work across phases which provides cohesion within and across the teams. Headteachers and governors have been well briefed about the strategy and information is shared effectively through network meetings, headteacher associations, governor training and the primary strategy website

47. The key to the success of the Essex approach is the very thorough and astute use of data to identify schools that need additional support. The LEA has pioneered a tool for evaluating the progress of schools using individual pupil data. This is used very effectively both to identify the specific support needed and to focus teachers' planning and pupils' learning. The criteria for triggering support are relevant and include evidence of significant differences between results for English and mathematics and inadequate progress between Key Stages 1 and 2. Schools receiving intensive support have made significantly more progress than Essex schools as a whole, in terms of the value added to pupils' attainment.

48. Between 1999 and 2003 results at Key Stage 2 improved in line with the national trend, with especially notable improvements by boys in English as a result of the Essex writing project. However, provisional results for 2004 are disappointing as the trend of overall improvement has not always been maintained. Nevertheless, these results are further evidence of the need to concentrate resources on improving

standards in Reception and Key Stage 1 in order to lay the foundation for further improvement at Key Stage 2 in the future.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

49. Support for this area has improved from satisfactory to good. Officers provide effective and purposeful leadership. The carefully considered strategy for ICT in the curriculum is informed by a thorough analysis of comprehensive information and data. Support is consistently targeted to need. There are well-established systems for monitoring and evaluating both the effectiveness of support and school provision and a wide range of strategies for disseminating best practice. All the national targets for the ratios of computers to pupils have been met or exceeded.

50. The feature that makes Essex stand out from other authorities is the creative use of innovative software for, among other things, tracking pupils' progress. This, along with other good quality assistance, training and guidance from advisory staff, provides schools with increasingly effective support for assessment and planning for progression. Year-on-year improvements are being secured in the quality of teaching of ICT and pupils' achievement. Standards at Key Stage 3 have exceeded the national targets for the proportions of pupils attaining Level 5 and above.

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

51. The support provided for this aspect is highly satisfactory. The approach is well aligned to the national strategy and responds to local needs. It has taken good account of the strategies for raising standards in Key Stage 2. In particular data about prior performance at school, subject and individual pupil level are used well. Thus, support is well targeted both to schools' individual needs and their capacity to manage additional provision.

52. The Key Stage 3 team is well qualified to challenge and support schools in all the strategy's strands. Skilled strand managers provide regular and high quality training for advanced skill and leading teachers, and also for school development advisers.

53. The LEA has drawn together the different strands into a coherent approach so that work on whole-school themes, for example leadership, ICT across the curriculum and assessment for learning, has resulted in good progress in many of those schools where support has been focused. The results at Key Stage 3 have improved steadily in line with national averages since the last inspection. However, the impact of the strategy in targeted schools is uneven. In some of these schools standards have fallen, in part because of some difficulties in recruiting and retaining good quality teaching staff. However, officers have not always been persistent enough to take action when the schools fail to attend training or do not participate fully in initiatives.

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children

54. Support for minority ethnic pupils, including for Gypsy and Traveller children, has improved from unsatisfactory to highly satisfactory. Areas of previously good provision have been maintained. Links with other services and agencies have strengthened, monitoring and support have improved, and the capacity of schools has developed. Elected members are undertaking a general scrutiny of access to education for Gypsy and Traveller pupils and additional funding provided for pupils beginning to learn English as an additional language has resulted in the majority making good progress.

55. National data identify the attainment of the majority of pupil groups as broadly in line with similar LEAs. Given the high quality of support, the performance of Traveller pupils is disappointing, although this partially reflects success in that more children with little previous schooling now attend schools. The thorough audit of data identifies raising the achievement of Bangladeshi pupils at Key Stage 2, as well as that of the lowest attaining and most vulnerable Traveller pupils, as priorities within the EDP. The project for Bangladeshi pupils not only targets underachievement, but also aims to increase further the capacity of schools to support the increasing numbers of pupils with English as an additional language through high level training for teaching assistants. Challenging targets are set for the performance of pupils from minority ethnic groups, but results have yet to be analysed to determine progress.

56. Following its integration into the advisory and inspection service, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) has improved provision for minority groups through strategic, well-organised and well-targeted support, with greater focus on school improvement. The Traveller education service is highly rated by schools for its good guidance and support, and for effective work with families and local communities. Grant funding is well targeted in line with the specific needs of Traveller groups, and provision is monitored thoroughly and evaluated for its effectiveness in raising attainment. Support for asylum seekers and refugees is well co-ordinated across a range of appropriate services.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

57. The support for gifted and talented pupils is highly satisfactory. Initiatives are well co-ordinated by two enthusiastic and determined school development advisers. Data on more able pupils are collected, analysed and used productively to inform strategic planning. Activities in the EDP are focused and relevant. In addition, a range of summer schools and other initiatives are offered and enhanced support is available for talented pupils through policies and action plans for sport, the arts and languages. The authority has a register of very able pupils who are monitored and tracked closely as they progress through the key stages. There is a growing awareness in schools of the need to set targets and monitor the progress of

gifted and talented pupils, although there is wide variability in the extent to which provision for gifted and talented pupils is embedded into practice within schools across the county.

58. An audit of schools' provision and a range of meetings with school co-ordinators have provided officers with satisfactory information to target training and support. Comprehensive guidance for schools is available on all aspects of provision, from identification and support for gifted and talented pupils through to advice on ensuring the welfare of pupils. Financial support is available for young people who achieve high standards in sport or the arts.

The supply and quality of teachers

59. This function is good. There is a good understanding of where and how teacher vacancies impact on school standards and the EDP details a wide range of initiatives to attract, train and support teachers. These include attendance at careers events, the introduction of graduate teacher and initial teacher programmes, advice on employing overseas trained teachers and a wide range of financial incentives for teachers moving to the county. There is specific targeting of resources to areas and schools in greatest need, including localities with social and economic disadvantage, schools causing concern and areas with high costs of housing. Rates of turnover of teaching staff are reducing. Vacancies are in now line with LEAs nationally, although recently these have risen slightly.

60. There is a good range of recruitment strategies underpinned by an analysis of schools' needs and an appropriate focus on accredited training programmes to support the career development of individual staff. Courses for continuing professional development (CPD) are rated highly and well attended. Evaluation of the impact of CPD on retention demonstrates increased levels of confidence by those teachers attending courses, which for some has contributed to a decision not to leave the profession.

61. Support for newly-appointed headteachers is satisfactory, although new headteachers report variability in the quality of provision. Newly-qualified teachers receive suitable support.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support information management

62. The quality of information management services is satisfactory. There are clear links between corporately provided support for ICT and the advisory service support for ICT within the curriculum. The council's website and the Essex Grid for Learning are accessible, up-to-date and used very effectively. A wide range of information about pupils is held electronically and used well by individual services. However, the different systems that support social inclusion are insufficiently well co-ordinated and the data are not used to the best effect. Steps are being taken to remedy this and funding has been agreed recently to establish integrated systems for pupil data.

63. The authority recognises the need to demonstrate to schools that the infrastructure for ICT is effective. Improvements are well in hand. Problems and frustrations that schools have had accessing information on the intranet are being resolved and the intranet is being refreshed and refined. The roll out of broadband has been slow and not entirely efficient, although there have been rigorous discussions to assure best value in the use of resources. A rapid acceleration to the pace of installation is required if the council is to achieve completion by the end of 2006.

Recommendation

- Closely monitor the plan to install broadband and take remedial action if there is any slippage to the proposed timescales.

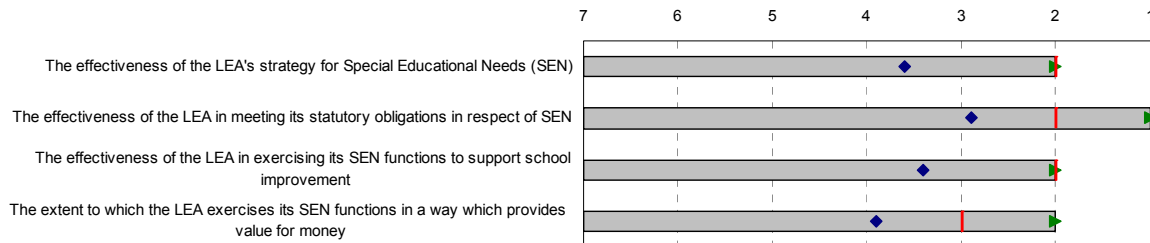
Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

64. The effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement remain highly satisfactory. The combining of services and the introduction of an area structure provide a good framework for effective differentiated school support and intervention. Astute use of sophisticated data on pupils' performance and clear and precise guidance for advisers have resulted in well-informed and progressively consistent practice. Schools are increasingly confident in the LEA's capacity to challenge and support them. Where schools have received targeted support, they have, on the whole, made good progress. Nevertheless, despite overall standards being in line with national averages, there is more work to do to improve attainment and progress in Key Stage 1. Costs are relatively low compared to other LEAs.

65. The planning and provision of services to support school improvement are good. Business planning endorses consistently the council's commitment to education. Advisers and consultants are deployed intelligently and flexibly. Their work is monitored closely and aligned well to the priorities in the EDP. Performance reviews for the advisory service are highly satisfactory and include meticulous induction and regular and relevant professional development.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for SEN

66. The strategy and planning for the inclusion of pupils with SEN remains good. There is a determination to improve the achievement of the lowest attaining pupils and an unequivocal focus on equipping schools to manage inclusion of SEN pupils. Both are underpinned by strong strategic leadership and effective decision-making. In turn, these are well informed by rigorous evaluation of high quality management information about SEN and by thorough analysis of cost-effectiveness. Plans for developing eight 'new model' special schools are far-reaching and ambitious, while well-costed and feasible. This investment is projected to reduce costs for the number of pupils currently educated in independent schools outside the authority.

67. From extensive consultation with schools and a wide range of partners, the strategy and policy take full account of external requirements, encompass corporate objectives and reflect the needs of schools. Provision for SEN permeates operational plans for school improvement and social inclusion. Outcomes are subject to regular and thorough monitoring by senior officers. In all, plans provide a strategic, comprehensive and carefully considered framework for action which is backed by innovative and relevant initiatives. Schools are committed strongly to inclusion and have a well-developed understanding of the implications of the strategy.

68. Effective work with partners, including voluntary agencies, is central to the strategy. Links with health and social services are now well established and increasingly strategic. Support services for school improvement have been amalgamated for more effective multi-disciplinary working. This positions the authority well in working towards its plans for integrated, multi-agency services within local areas. Nevertheless, the effective multi-agency support that exists in classrooms is not yet enabling schools sufficiently to manage the range and complexity of needs demanded by the Essex model of inclusion, especially for pupils with severe emotional and behavioural needs.

69. Stemming from the council's comprehensive access strategy, the Disability Access Plan establishes a coherent programme of multi-agency support to improve the accessibility of schools for pupils with a wide range of disabilities. This is well supported by helpful and practical guidance.

Statutory obligations

70. The authority is very effective in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN, an improvement on previously good performance. At 97%, (96% with exceptions), statutory assessments completed within the specified time limits are well above the national average. This is due in part to efficient and robust procedures for monitoring the progress of assessments and effective work between services and with relevant agencies. In addition, procedures for making assessments are clear and accompanied by good information, guidance and training to schools and other agencies. Particularly impressive work with parents, including that of independent parental supporters, has been successful with 'hard to reach' families and in outreach work on early intervention.

71. Statements and individual education plans (IEPs) are of good quality and demonstrate the involvement of parents and pupils. Procedures for statutory assessment are rigorously fair, although they are sometimes viewed as overly bureaucratic by schools. Key transition reviews, including those for looked after children, are prioritised for attendance by officers, with prompt amendments to provision. Information contained on the council's website is easily accessible, understandable, and helpful to both parents and professionals.

SEN functions to support school improvement

72. Support for SEN school improvement functions continues to be good. The LEA's monitoring and good use of data, alongside findings from external inspection, indicate that provision and progress for pupils with SEN are better than that found nationally. There is an upward trend in the performance of the lowest attaining 20% of pupils.

73. Special schools have been consulted extensively on their changing role and carefully monitored outreach work is currently increasing the capacity of mainstream schools to support pupils with more complex needs. Significant work in maintained and non-maintained pre-school settings has resulted in more effective early assessment and improved transition.

74. Reflecting the LEA's aspiration for self-managing schools, a comprehensive annual framework for audit and review requires schools to compare expenditure on SEN against the relative progress of the lowest attaining pupils, while taking into account views of pupils and their parents. Significantly, this document fulfils several purposes. It functions as a mechanism for monitoring the use and impact of delegated funding. It also informs the challenge function of SDAs, provides information to governors, assists in defining future levels of support and acts as a vehicle for the sharing of good practice. However, some schools are concerned over

the time taken for its completion and are therefore not yet entirely convinced of its value.

75. The LEA ensures full and consistent implementation of the Code of Practice. All pupils with SEN, with or without statements, have detailed IEPs, which are well monitored to ensure alignment to need. Focused SEN reviews and key SEN data are used effectively to identify schools causing concern, which are then well supported through an attached education psychologist (EP), a specialist teacher and a behaviour support teacher. Special educational needs co-ordinators are well supported in their role through comprehensive and continuously updated manuals, high quality publications and accredited training, which is also available to teaching assistants.

76. Support from SEN services is of good quality, although a few schools report inadequate time allocation and some discontinuity from a high turnover of EPs, and insufficient, although good, support for behaviour.

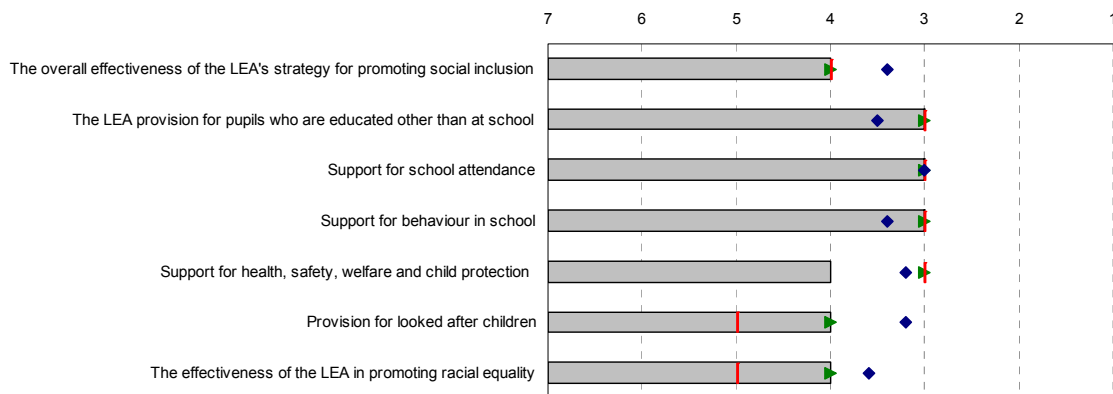
Value for money

77. Value for money has improved from highly satisfactory to good, due in part to secure and well-established mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effect of SEN funding devolved to schools. Resources are allocated clearly. Descriptors used for the banding of 'needs-led' funding are transparent and applied consistently; greater differentiation is being considered. Moderation, through area clusters and at county level, ensures additional effective challenge. In line with the direction of policy, more pupils with statements attend mainstream provision; the percentage of pupils in special schools has slightly reduced; and fewer pupils with learning difficulties have transferred from mainstream to special schools.

78. Costs of SEN services compare favourably with those in similar LEAs. Cost projections are reasonable, given factors outside of the control of the authority. Budgets retained centrally are in line with priorities in the strategy and senior officers carefully track spending and spending trends. Budget management reports, regularly provided to elected members, support timely decision-making. The council has been working on arrangements for SEN transport to obtain better value on costs and quality. This has led to improvements. Concern raised by schools and families are being addressed.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year. 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

The strategy for social inclusion

79. The promotion of social inclusion remains satisfactory, although there has been significant progress in a number of key areas. The re-structuring of services, the strengthened cross-service and multi-agency working and the developing CYPSP are positioning the authority well for further improvement. A wide range of multi-agency initiatives are gradually increasing the capacity of schools to manage inclusion, but officers realise that there remains much to do to improve co-ordination and strategic alliances. Officers are working hard at this, while also planning for more effective delivery of services through local areas.

80. The strategy for social inclusion is not yet entirely coherent, although it reflects corporate priorities, permeates strategic and service plans and is suitably linked to improving attainment. Key elected members are full advocates of the strategy and take their responsibilities seriously. A range of good quality publications and guidance about social inclusion serves schools well. Schools report increasing challenge from officers to improve inclusive practice. Promoting the achievement of specific groups of pupils features strongly in the EDP. At service level, individual officers have access to a relevant range of data. Information, however, is not held centrally, which restricts the evaluation of the impact and cost effectiveness of the strategy, and limits strategic decision-making.

81. In line with the council's strategic objectives, and based on comprehensive information on localities, significant resources are well targeted to disadvantage. In addition, there are examples of successful operational work with other services and agencies, such as the police authority on improving attendance, the health service on planning for children's centres, multi-agency work on Sure Start initiatives and work in extended schools. These demonstrate notable success in promoting

inclusion, improving attainment and reducing exclusion. However, the plethora of initiatives is insufficiently linked and lacks coherence. Schools have limited knowledge of the difference that initiatives are making. Communication is not sufficiently strong to allay the reserve expressed by some schools that the promotion of social inclusion is to the detriment of school improvement.

82. Plans for the Children's Trust are strategic and well constructed, aligning the work of various stakeholders to shared objectives and outcomes. This structure is sensibly exploring pathways to multi-agency intervention and prevention, and informing the future delivery of services.

Recommendations

- Define more clearly the strategy for social inclusion and communicate this to schools.
- Improve data systems to ensure better access to, and analysis of, information so that these can be used more effectively to monitor the progress of vulnerable groups, to evaluate the impact of the strategy and to inform strategic decision-making.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

83. Provision for pupils educated other than at school is highly satisfactory. The integrated support service has a clear role to offer short-term support which facilitates successful and prompt reintegration into school. Schools are clear about the range of provision and support available, and referral systems are transparent. Funding, resources and staffing are well targeted and systems for monitoring provision are secure. There are particularly helpful guidance materials on pupils with a long-term illness and those who are anxious school refusers. Secondary schools report positively on the re-admission of permanently excluded pupils. A 'hard to place' protocol has been agreed in principle in most areas of the county and in many localities there are re-integration panels. However, not all schools are committed fully to the process.

84. The authority maintains up-to-date lists of pupils who are educated other than at school. Until recently, information was held separately by a number of services, thus restricting the evaluation of cost-effectiveness. A single database is now in place for the majority of pupils. Pupils are well supported through IEPs and access, albeit limited, to Connexions service advisers. At Key Stage 4, a suitable range of alternative, flexible and accredited provision is available and increasing numbers of pupils continue after the age of 16 to further study or find suitable employment. Detailed reports on home-educated pupils contain helpful advice to parents.

Support for attendance

85. Support for school attendance continues to be highly satisfactory. Levels of attendance in both primary and secondary schools are in line with national averages and the averages in similar LEAs, but the council has yet to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of support.

86. Since the previous inspection, responsibility for the deployment of education welfare officers has been devolved to clusters of primary and secondary schools. This is increasing the opportunity for a prompt response to need and immediate attention to emerging issues. Good use is made of both guidance and statutory powers to improve attendance. In particular, a fast track to court procedure has been used in three secondary schools to positive effect. The LEA makes constructive use of supervision orders to meet statutory obligations.

87. Strong operational partnerships with other education services have led to improved attendance for Travellers, looked after children, those on the child protection register and for children and young people educated other than at school.

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

88. During this inspection, fieldwork followed through procedures for child protection, but not for health and safety. Support for child protection is satisfactory. Improvement, however, has not kept sufficient pace with national developments and there is some deterioration in the delivery of this function since the previous inspection. Nevertheless, rapid improvement has been secured within the last few months and the prospects for further improvement are encouraging.

89. The protection and welfare of pupils are given a high priority and a new education safeguarding service has been established to oversee and co-ordinate the work in this area. A series of briefings and refresher sessions have been provided for schools to update them on changes to child protection legislation. There are now effective systems to monitor the take-up of training and to issue reminders to schools if they have not attended. Reports from school inspections are scrutinised carefully and, where necessary, cross-service meetings are called to follow through findings. However, linkages across teams are not yet sufficiently systematic and co-ordinated to enable effective monitoring of schools' internal procedures.

90. During interviews, schools expressed some significant concerns about the speed and nature of the response to referrals about children in need of protection. Services within education are working closely with those in social care, and steps to improve matters are being taken.

Recommendations

- Improve further the arrangements for the monitoring of the child protection function in schools.
- Ensure that there are:
 - well-established and clearly understood procedures by which schools can report concerns; and
 - systems that respond promptly and sensitively to concerns about the welfare and safety of children and young people in need of protection.

Provision for looked after children

91. Provision for looked after children has improved from unsatisfactory to satisfactory. A multi-agency corporate parenting service has been established to co-ordinate provision and to provide training. More challenging performance targets have been set for children and young people, in line with the recommendations in the previous report. Elected members are taking the necessary action to ensure that they meet the council's statutory requirement to act as the corporate parent for looked after children.

92. Steps have been taken to ensure that looked after children have high priority in admissions to schools. There has been improvement in the levels of attainment of children looked after in Essex schools at Key Stage 2 and results for five or more A*-C grades at GCSE compare favourably with the national picture. However, there remains underachievement in the proportion of looked after children attaining at least one GCSE qualification. Furthermore, despite some year-on-year improvement, participation by looked after children after the age of 16 in education, training and employment is comparatively low.

93. There are established protocols for sharing information between the social care element of the children and young people's service and the school-related services, although monitoring of progress, and the analysis and interrogation of data are constrained by separate electronic databases. Properly reviewed and up-to-date personal education plans are not in place for all looked after children.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all looked after children have personal education plans.
- Establish manageable procedures for consistently and systematically monitoring the quality of personal education plans.

Promoting racial equality

94. The promotion of race equality has improved from unsatisfactory to satisfactory. Strong corporate emphasis has galvanised action across the council and progress has accelerated, especially in the last few months. Equality issues

feature in the council's core values of fairness and equal access to opportunities. These are manifested through the equality and diversity plan and demonstrated within learning and social care. The authority has undergone a step change. Good quality guidance to schools suitably links social inclusion with improved attainment and almost all schools have produced race equality action plans. A number of initiatives promote awareness, including publications, training, work through EMAS and by governor services. However, there is a gap between strong guidance and the confident promotion of race equality in schools.

95. Following extensive consultation, comprehensive guidance on dealing with and reporting racist incidents is available to schools, accompanied by leaflets for parents and pupils. The agreed racist incident procedures are used and returned by almost all schools. An analysis of returns is reported to the policy development group, but schools and other elected members are not aware that this is available to them on the council's website. EMAS staff are actively involved in casework arising from referrals from schools, and serious and persistent incidents are followed up on a case-by-case basis. However, specific action to address patterns in reported incidents is not identified.

Recommendation

- Work with schools, officers, relevant partners and agencies to identify actions necessary to address patterns in the reporting of racist incidents, and to enable schools to respond confidently and constructively to incidents.

Appendix A

Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA : Essex Local Education Authority

LEA number: 881

Reporting
Inspector: Christine Brown HMI

Date of
Inspection: October 2004

| No | Required Inspection Judgement | Grade | Fieldwork* |
|-----|---|-------|------------|
| | Context of the LEA | | |
| 1 | The socio-economic context of the LEA | 3 | |
| | Overall judgements | | |
| 0.1 | The progress made by the LEA overall | 3 | |
| 0.2 | Overall effectiveness of the LEA | 3 | |
| 0.3 | The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection | 3 | |
| | Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership | | |
| 1.1 | The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | 3 | |
| 1.2 | The implementation of corporate planning for education | 4 | |
| 1.3 | The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | 4 | |
| 1.4 | The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | 3 | |
| 1.5 | The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | 3 | |
| 1.6 | The leadership provided by elected members (including | 4 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|----|
| | quality of advice) | | |
| 1.7 | The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | 3 | |
| 1.8 | The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | 3 | |
| 1.9 | Support for Early Years education | 2 | NF |
| 1.10 | Support for 14 – 19 education | 4 | |
| Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation | | | |
| 2.1 | The LEA's strategy for school improvement | 2 | |
| 2.2 | The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement | 2 | |
| 2.3 | The performance of schools | 4 | |
| 2.4 | The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention | 3 | |
| 2.5 | The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data | 2 | |
| 2.6 | The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need | 2 | |
| 2.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools | 4 | |
| 2.8 | The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning | 3 | |
| 2.9 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places | 3 | |
| 2.10 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools | 4 | |
| Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement | | | |
| 3.1 | Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement | 2 | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|----|
| 3.2 | Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2 | 2 | |
| 3.3 | Support for information and communication technology | 2 | |
| 3.4 | Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3 | 3 | |
| 3.5 | Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children | 3 | |
| 3.6 | Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils | 3 | |
| 3.7 | Support for school governors | 1 | NF |
| 3.8 | The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers | 2 | |
| 3.9 | The planning and provision of services to support school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9a | The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9b | The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management | 1 | NF |
| 3.9c | The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.9d | The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management | 4 | |
| 3.10 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.11 | The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 2 | |
| 3.12 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 3 | |
| Section 4: Support for special educational needs | | | |
| 4.1 | The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs | 2 | |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|----|
| 4.2 | The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN | 1 | |
| 4.3 | The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement | 2 | |
| 4.4 | The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money | 2 | |
| Section 5: Support for social inclusion | | | |
| 5.1 | The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion | 4 | |
| 5.2 | The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place | 3 | |
| 5.3 | Support for school attendance | 3 | |
| 5.4 | Support for behaviour in schools | 3 | NF |
| 5.5 | Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | 4 | |
| 5.6 | Provision for looked after children | 4 | |
| 5.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality | 4 | |

**NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory; Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

Note: in the case of JRS 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and JRS 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparisons against national averages:

- Grades 1-2: Well above
- Grade 3: Above
- Grade 4: In line
- Grade 5: Below
- Grades 6-7: Well below.

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

This inspection of Essex LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in February 2001;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• support for Early Years education;• support for school governors;• the planning and provision of services to support school management - financial; human resources; and property;• the effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management;• support for behaviour in schools. |
|--|

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

Context of the LEA

Essex is a large authority with a population of about 1.3 million living in urban and rural locations. The county has considerable social diversity, including areas of severe disadvantage as well as affluence. Some 29.3% of the population are in social classes one and two, which is higher than the figure for similar LEAs (28.4 %) and for England as a whole (27.2%). In contrast, the percentage with higher education qualifications, at 15.6%, is slightly lower than those for statistical neighbours (18.9%) and England (19.8%). Unemployment is well below national averages.

The school population is about 203,000. Pupils in Essex are generally more advantaged than is the case nationally. Entitlement to free school meals is 11.5% in primary schools, compared with 17.3% nationally, and 9.7% for secondary schools, compared with 15.3% nationally. The proportions of primary and secondary pupils having statements of special educational needs are below average. The authority provides a free place for all three and four year old pupils whose parents request one.

The proportion of children and young people from minority ethnic groups is 6.3%, compared with 17% in the country as a whole. Proportions of pupils with English as an additional language are 1.6% in primary schools and 2.1% in secondary schools. Both of these figures are in line with the national figures.

The authority maintains two nursery, 474 primary, 80 secondary and 21 special schools, as well as six pupil referral units. The county has one of the highest proportions of Foundation schools in the country, with 58 primary, 49 secondary and one special school in this category. Provision for primary-aged pupils is organised in infant, junior and all-through schools. Secondary provision includes four single sex grammar schools as well as 11-16 and 11-18 comprehensives, most of which are co-educational.

Nine secondary schools have been awarded Leading Edge Status and 58 have Specialist Status: 12 for technology, seven for sports, nine for arts, five for language, ten for science, five for mathematics and computing, seven for business and enterprise, one for engineering, one for humanities and one for combined science/mathematics/computing. Post-16 provision in the county includes two further education colleges, two sixth form colleges and four tertiary colleges. There are around 14,000 students aged 16-19 in full-time education.

The size of Essex dictates complex arrangements for partnership working. In addition to Essex Police, Essex Fire and Rescue and the local Learning and Skills Council, there are 12 district and borough councils, the Strategic Health authority, 11 Primary Care Trusts and eight acute or provider trusts. The county council plays an active role in the 12 LSPs. The county CYPSP is the key body for planning from 0-19. There are also 10 local CYPSPs which link directly to the LSPs.

The performance of schools

Pupils' attainment is in line with national averages and averages in similar LEAs, with the exception of the above national average performance by pupils attaining Level 4 and above in English tests at Key Stage 2. Between 1999 and 2003, the rate of improvement at Key Stages 1 and 2 and at GCSE was in line with the national rates and those in similar LEAs. Over the same period, the rate of improvement at Key Stage 3 was in line with similar LEAs and, for English, in line with the national trend. In mathematics and science the rates of improvements were below the national trends.

Despite improvements, the authority did not meet its 2002 performance targets. In 2003, the authority met its targets for GCSE and for the proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 and above in mathematics at Key Stage 2, and Level 5 and above in mathematics at Key Stage 3. There is wide variation in the performance of individual schools. In 2003, three secondary schools did not achieve floor targets set by the DfES of 25% of pupils attaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE. (Initial indications are that in 2004 only one secondary school was below the floor targets). At Key Stage 2, nearly 15% of schools in English, and well over 20% of schools in mathematics, did not achieve the floor target of 65% for the proportion of pupils attaining level 4 or more.

Inspection findings indicate that the percentages of Essex primary and secondary schools judged to be good or very good are in line with both the national average and the average for similar LEAs. Evidence from schools that have been inspected twice suggests that improvements have been made at primary and secondary level with regard to the quality of education, school climate, management and efficiency and standards.

Rates of attendance, unauthorised absence and permanent exclusion are broadly in line with national averages in both primary and secondary schools.

Funding data for the LEA

| SCHOOLS BUDGET | Essex | Statistical neighbours average | County Average | ENGLAND AVERAGE |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Individual schools budget | 2,764 | 2,704 | 2,693 | 2,900 |
| Standards fund delegated | 64 | 58 | 58 | 63 |
| Excellence in Cities | 9 | 4 | 5 | 35 |
| Schools in financial difficulty | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Education for under fives (non-ISB) | 101 | 86 | 93 | 85 |
| Strategic management | 11 | 35 | 25 | 30 |
| Special educational needs | 133 | 116 | 116 | 126 |
| Grants | 11 | 10 | 15 | 26 |
| Access | 65 | 48 | 46 | 60 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 5 | 29 | 31 | 24 |
| TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET | 3,168 | 3,092 | 3,085 | 3,354 |
| Schools formula spending share | 3,090 | 2,912 | 2,919 | 3,197 |

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

| LEA BUDGET | Essex | Statistical neighbours average | County Average | ENGLAND AVERAGE |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Strategic management | 57 | 85 | 87 | 99 |
| Specific Grants | 5 | 13 | 11 | 14 |
| Special educational needs | 21 | 29 | 30 | 36 |
| School improvement | 27 | 35 | 34 | 38 |
| Access | 164 | 155 | 183 | 142 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Youth and Community | 54 | 58 | 52 | 75 |
| TOTAL LEA BUDGET | 328 | 377 | 400 | 406 |

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

Notes:

All figures are net.

Funding for schools in financial difficulties excludes transitional funding.

Averages quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average.

Notes